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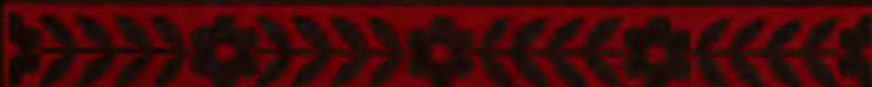
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FORBIDDEN TO WED



MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS









MRS. BANKS'S NOVELS.

UNIFORM SERIES.

FORBIDDEN TO WED.







Yours faithfully,
Isabella Babcock.

FORBIDDEN TO WED

BY

MRS. G. LINNÆUS BANKS,

*Author of "God's Providence House," "The Manchester Man,"
"Glory," &c.*

WITH PORTRAIT AND VIGNETTE.



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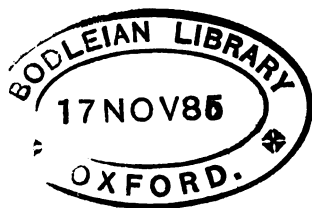
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FORBIDDEN TO WED.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY.

"WHAT! nursing again, Muriel! What is Betty doing, and where is thy mother?" cried Mrs. Bancroft, the furrier, as she walked into the back parlour of her son-in-law's house, the mere turn of a handle having opened the front entrance for her, without the ceremony of knocking. It was only when rioters or other rough people were about that doors were bolted during daylight in the last century, or indeed in the early years of this. A slim girl, not more than eleven years of age, was pacing the floor with a baby-brother in her slender arms. She answered cheerfully:

"Betty is washing dishes in the back kitchen, and mother is upstairs putting the clean clothes away. I have not had Georgey very long, grandmother. And I don't mind nursing him one bit when he doesn't cry. He has given over now."

"Oh! then he has been crying?" and there was some acerbity in the old lady's tone, as if *she* had "minded" very much.

"A little. Poor fellow, his teeth plague him, mother says;" and Muriel D'Anyer bent over the big boy in her arms with such a look of pitiful affection in her large dark-brown eyes, as clearly told she was in earnest, though he did make her arms ache, and her heart too when she could not still his complaining.

"I suppose Anna and Marion are both at school?" again questioned Mrs. Bancroft. "And where is Sara?"

"Upstairs with mother. Hsh, hsh,"—this to the boy whose lip was again curling to a cry.

The old lady's chintz gown of printed linen was open in the front over a quilted petticoat, though tucked up behind to keep her train out of the dust, and on each side, under this open robe, a pannier-like pocket balanced its fellow. By a bright steel chain depended from her waist the sheathed scissors and plump pin-cushion, without which no good housewife was equipped. Her keys would have dangled from another chain, but that out of doors they were slipped into the right-hand pocket, and were consequently invisible, even the chain being lost under the over-gown. It was summer time, and a scarf-like mantle of black silk covered her shoulders, as mittens covered her arms, leaving her fingers bare and free to use; the bonnet on her head towered high above her lappet-like cap, and assisted by her high-heeled shoes (buckled across the instep) imparted height and importance to a short figure.

Emptying from one pocket a store of cherries, and cakes from the other, she kissed the girl on the forehead, and said, "Divide these amongst you when your sisters come home," and without waiting for thanks quitted the room and marched upstairs.

She found her daughter, Mrs. D'Anyer—quite a young-looking woman to be the mother of five children—on her knees in front of a carved oak coffer, her own gift to the married couple. She was counting and arranging her household sheets and napery fresh from the airing, with little Sara, a fair-haired beauty of three years, watching her movements, and hindering under the pretext of help.

Without a word of prelude Mrs. Bancroft began, in a broader vernacular than I care to inflict on my readers, common as it was then to the manufacturing class:—

"I tell thee what, Ellen, I shall not leave Muriel here any longer to be kept from school, and sacrificed to that boy. She is not strong enough."

Mrs. D'Anyer rose to salute her mother, but her gentle "How do you do?" changed to a faltering apology, "Well, mother, I should not have kept her at home to-day, but I was very busy—"

"And always will be," interrupted her mother; "every day brings its own duties, and every household its own work; only contrivance and management can keep the hour's work to the hour. But busy or not busy, I'm not going to see Muriel grow lopsided with lugging a great lad about, and grow up in ignorance whilst her sisters are being properly educated. Thah must have a nurse if Betty has no time. I know thah't not so strong as thah should be—all the fruits of marrying too young—and thah needs help; but I don't think John will mind thee keeping a stout lass

to nurse that lad of his. If he does, *I'll* pay her wages ; and as I mean to take Muriel off your hands altogether, that will square accounts."

Mrs. D'Anyer, a mild, timid little woman, stood in no small awe of her prompt, energetic mother, but she also stood in fear of her husband, and ventured a sort of expostulatory protest, to which the old lady paid no sort of heed.

"I tell, thee, Ellen," she maintained, "the eldest girl in a large family is always made a drudge to the rest ; it was so in my case, but I'll take care it shall not be Muriel's lot. She shall go home with me ; I'll see her educated. John won't miss her. I don't think he has cared for the lass since the illness that seamed her face and spoiled her beauty ;" and she wiped a handkerchief over her own face, warm with the excitement and energy of her speech.

"Oh, mother !" was all the younger woman could interject in remonstrance, as she placed the last pile of linen in the coffer and closed the heavy lid.

"Ah, thah may say, 'Oh, mother !' but thah knows it's true. I'll go and have a talk to John in the warehouse. I suppose I shall find him there," and off she went, determined not to let her project cool.

It has been said that Mrs. Bancroft was a furrier. It may be added that she had for many years carried on most successfully the extensive wholesale business of her dead husband, in premises situated in the rear of her handsome, double-fronted, red-brick house on Red Bank, Manchester, and was accounted a wealthy woman in her sphere. Wealthy, that is, as the world goes ; her possessions could be reckoned in houses and land, bought and sold as merchandise ; she went regularly to church, stood in good repute, and had a profound veneration for religious profession in others.

Dingy enough now is the thoroughfare known as Red Bank ; even fifty years ago the deterioration had begun, smoke doing more than the finger of Time to tone down tints of brickwork and stone ; nay, a publican had set his sign over what had been Mrs. Bancroft's door, there were shops where had been private houses, and inferior structures were creeping up the steep hill sides to obliterate every trace of grass or of the red sand from which the road took its name. Yet was the verdant country close at hand in Mrs. Bancroft's time, grass and flowers and bushes were plentiful atop of the rugged red banks left on either side by successive lowerings of the hill, over which then ran the main road to Rochdale and Bury from Scotland Bridge and the

valley of the Irk upwards, and Mrs. Bancroft's house at the foot of the brow was a residence of some pretensions.

Twelve years prior to this decided enunciation of opinion relative to her favourite grandchild Muriel, her own daughter Ellen was a dark-haired, vivacious damsel of sixteen, the youthful roundness of whose cheeks softened the high cheek bones, which age or illness might define and sharpen as they had done for the elder woman. They were alike short in stature, alike active and notable, but the resolute set of the mouth and the energy of the woman had no signs of development in the girl.

At that period dancing was an accomplishment more for the aristocracy than for traders, but a certain Madam Bland had opened an academy in a fashionable part of the town for such as could afford to pay well for instruction, and Mrs. Bancroft did not hesitate to enrol Ellen among the select circle of Madam Bland's pupils, as a finishing touch to an education which had, to say the least, cost much.

No retail trader could have gained admission for son or daughter into that circle; the line was drawn at merchants and manufacturers; but of all those who did most honour to Madam's professorship was John D'Anyer, who, though but the son of a Manchester manufacturer, yet boasted he had blue blood in his veins as in his name.

He was barely twenty, yet he stood six feet high, and had a figure as finely proportioned as his handsome face. Dancing was only one of his many accomplishments, but it was the one in which his peculiar graces of form and manner were most likely to move impressionable hearts; and Ellen Bancroft was not the only damsel who sighed for him. But in her case the attraction was mutual. And not alone in minuet or cortillion had they seen and admired each other. The Bancroft and the D'Anyer pews in the Collegiate Church adjoined, there was speaking acquaintance between the elders, and the two young people might be said to have grown up under each other's eye.

In Madam Bland's academy the acquaintance ripened rapidly; it furnished occasions for mutual intercourse unsuspected at home, and led to a step not in the Terpsichorean programme.

One sunny morning when early May blossoms scented the air, Miss Bancroft, arrayed as for a fashionable assembly in a dress of cherry-colour-and-white satin brocade, her hair elaborately coiled by the peruquier, was handed by her admiring mother into a sedan chair at the door of the house on Red Bank, as was customary on dancing days, and it slightly struck the mother that "the lass was in an unusual flurry."

Be this as it may, the chairmen bore the sedan, not to Madam Bland's, but to the Collegiate Church; and when they again set her down at her unsuspecting mother's door she was the wife of John D'Anyer.

No one's advice had been asked, and no one's counsel taken. The girl, captivated by a handsome face and graceful figure, had allowed his dominant will to control her. Had any reason existed for secrecy beyond their immature age, it was unknown.

Three months later a loud ran-tan, tan, tan, tan, on the heavy knocker, startled the echoes in the Red Bank house. Mrs. Bancroft had just come in from the warehouse for her four o'clock tea, and a maid was carrying the mahogany tea board, with its freight of tiny handleless cups and saucers, into the household room, and almost dropped it in her fright.

The clang on the knocker had not ceased when she opened the door, and Mr. John D'Anyer, in a fashionable suit of plum-coloured kerseymere, with silver buckles at his breeches' knees and on the instep of his high-heeled shoes, crushed past her into the lobby, and in thick but imperious tones demanded to see his "wife."

Margery insisted that he had mistaken the house, and failing to convince him, turned back to seek her mistress in the kitchen.

To her amazement he followed her, not too steadily, down the passage, to be confronted by Mrs. Bancroft, who stood with her face towards him, by the white deal table, under the broad window, at which Ellen was washing, in a large bowl, lace ruffles and lawn kerchiefs, too dainty to be sent to a common clear-starcher.

It was evident the young man had taken too much wine; his three-cornered hat was awry, the ruffles at his wrists, the falling neckcloth edged with lace, were sullied and disordered; and so Mrs. Bancroft thought were his wits, as he repeated, "I have come for my wife; I want my wife."

"Your wife?" she echoed, and would have added, "There is no wife of yours here," but she chanced to glance towards her daughter, and the words died upon her lips.

It needed not his iteration of "Yes, Ellen; my wife!" that white face, that shrinking, trembling figure told all.

Whether in wrath, or to keep the girl from fainting, she could never decide with herself, she took up the earthen bowl, and dashed its contents, water and lace together, upon the daughter who had deceived her.

"Take your wife, take her! and never let her darken my doors again!" she cried, sternly, and passed out of the kitchen,

not to return until the door had closed upon them both, as *she* had closed the door of her heart.

Though an only daughter, Ellen was not an only child. She had a brother three years her senior, training to succeed his mother in the business. His intercession for his sister might have been expected.

Nothing of the kind occurred. Samuel Bancroft had not a thought beyond self. He sat down to the tea table, after a rough preliminary scrub in the scullery, rendered necessary by his duties in the skin yard—was briefly told what had occurred, bidden never to name his sister again—and had no desire to transgress.

He could have told, had he been so minded, that he had been deputed to break the secret to his mother; but he preferred to assume ignorance, and wipe his clean hands of the offending pair, as he hoped to wipe his sister out of the mother's will by and by.

Months went by—months which sharpened and hardened the outlines of Sarah Bancroft's face. An idol had been shattered, and nothing had replaced it. Her seat in the Old Church was vacant; she resolutely passed its walls and trudged forward to St. Ann's (there being no church nearer home at that time); but though she heard the words, "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation," Sabbath by Sabbath, she refused to take their import to herself. If there was any softening of the heart, it was unknown; the silence peremptorily enjoined at the outset became habitual; her business did not throw her in the way of the D'Anyers, and she knew nothing even of her daughter's whereabouts. Whether she felt more keenly the barb of her child's ungrateful secrecy, or the prolonged estrangement, could not be told; but unspoken feeling of some kind brought out more sharply the prominence of her cheek bone, and ploughed fresh lines on her brow.

She had several brothers and brothers-in-law in different trades; but their places of business lying away across the town, they did not often meet.

One sleety afternoon in the following February, as she was shaking hands with a Bolton hatter, to whom she had sold a parcel of rabbit skins (to be felted into veritable beaver), her brother Ralph, a cotton merchant, stepped into the warehouse, amongst piles of skins, and barely waiting until the hatter's back was turned began:—

"Sarah, dost thah know the tale that's goin' about the town?"

"What tale?" said both eyes and lips.

"Why, that thy daughter Ellen was turned out of the house

wringin' wet, with no clothes but what she stood up in, and is now livin' on the *charity* of the D'Anyers!"

Mrs. Bancroft changed countenance. "Wringing wet!" "No clothes!" she echoed, as if unaware how literally Ellen's dismissal had been taken, but her pride caught up the one word "*charity*," and her breast heaved as with a pent-up burden. "Charity! charity!" she exclaimed. "My daughter living upon *charity*! I'll see about that!" and to her brother's surprise, before he was aware of her intentions, she was across the yard, in the house, and out again at the front, with the hood of her scarlet cloth cloak over her bonnet, and her pattens on her feet, hurrying through the wet to the smallware manufacturer's in Cannon-street, panting as she went with suppressed and contending emotions.

"I hear that my daughter is said to be living on your *charity*, Mr. D'Anyer," she began abruptly, as the old smallware manufacturer presented himself before his unexpected visitor.

"Nay, nay, Mrs. Bancroft, Ellen is as welcome as th' flowers i' May. I put another loom down when she came, that's all, and I mean to put another down now th' little lass hath come! I always put a fresh loom down when a fresh mouth comes to be filled; and the more the merrier, say I. I only wish Nelly herself was stronger; but she has never fairly got over the wetting you gave her."

Mrs. Bancroft felt herself rebuked, though she did not take in the full purport of his speech. "Well, sir," said she, ignoring the censure, "you can put the profit of your looms to other uses. I do not intend *my* daughter to live on any one's *charity*. If your son has neither business to maintain his wife, nor home to take her to, it is time he had. And I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll furnish them a house, and I'll be five hundred pounds towards setting him up in business, if you'll be another five hundred; and they can come to *my* house until they have one of their own. But no living on *charity*!" and the word came out with a gasp.

"There has been no charity, my good friend," said Mr. D'Anyer, with a genial smile. "No one regretted John's secret and precipitate match more than myself and Mally (his wife), but my son's wife is my daughter, and as such we made her welcome. And I shall be glad to meet you half-way in giving them a start in life, either in my trade, or yours, or one of your brothers'. But they will have to stay here until they have a house of their own. We are not so thick on the spot as we were, and the place is big enough to hold us all. Besides—Ellen cannot be

removed, and I don't think it would be safe for you to see her just yet; she must not be agitated. But there's naught to hinder you seeing the little lass."

"What little lass?" Mrs. Bancroft would have asked, but he was out of the room, and she who had gone there in high-handed pride and indignation, was left to institute comparisons and ponder his meaning. Presently he returned with a long-robed infant in his patriarchal arms—and then she was enlightened.

Pride, indignation, resentment, dissolved in tears over her first grandchild's face.

Little Muriel had come as a pacificator.

CHAPTER II.

SETTLED.

A THOUSAND pounds was a goodly capital to commence business with in 1778, when John D'Anyer elected to turn fustian manufacturer, a term at that time of very wide signification. A warehouse was found and fitted for his trade in Sugar Lane, not far from his own father's thread and smallware manufactory in Cannon-street, so called because the iron posts at the street corners were cannon. Then Mrs. Bancroft, reconciled to the young people, furnished for them, solidly and well, a house in Broom-street, close by, the exclusive respectability of which was maintained by posts and chains to bar the ingress of unprivileged vehicles. Whatever the street may be now, it was then genteel—and dull; but Broom-street and Sugar Lane met at a sharp angle, and there was the advantage of communication at the back between house and warehouse. Steam power had not been introduced into manufactories, and very few were fitted up with elaborate machinery. Outlay was chiefly for raw material and workpeople's wages. In John D'Anyer's, for instance, warpers—generally women—carried home great hanks of yarn in their canvas bags, or "pokes," and brought it back on their heads in huge flat balls, warped; that is, threads of sufficient number and length for the piece of cloth, arranged and grouped together systematically by means of pegs in the warper's cottage wall. The handloom weavers took home the warp, with twist for the weft, and brought it back in the piece; again it went

out to be bleached or dyed, and, in case of fustians, to be cut. In these days so many processes are carried on in one set of premises that immense capitals are required. Then John D'Anyer was considered to start under very favourable auspices, and expected to make a fortune, as others had done before him.

But they were plodders, he was not. He was proud to be his own master, and the master of others; had taken to the business kindly, and was not too proud to doff his coat and lend a hand either to putter-out or packer. Then, being vain of his penmanship, he conducted his own correspondence, not a very onerous duty, and kept his own books, with a clerk under him; and was as good a buyer and seller as any on 'Change. But he was vain of his person as well as of his penmanship, and was apt to vary the monotony of the Exchange Room with a stroll under the trees of St. Ann's Square, the adjacent fashionable promenade, or arm in arm with friend or cousin of his own age, who had more money than wit, finish the day at the cockpit, or it might be in a carouse.

And in this John D'Anyer must not be judged by our standard. Temperance had not become a creed; a man amongst men was he who could carry most liquor with the steadiest legs and the clearest head; and so long as a man was up and about his business during the day, no one troubled himself how he spent his nights. That concerned no one but the people at home.

And it must not be supposed that John D'Anyer's proclivity for convivial society was such as to interfere with his business, or make him other than a gentleman, although he had demanded his girl-wife in most unseemly fashion. He was wont to say he "would not give a button for any man who could not be anything in any society," and certainly the polished gentleman occasionally descended. He was, however, a strict disciplinarian in business or out, and his devoted little wife, who had not her mother's strength of will, was too timid to oppose act or word of his, too nervous to propose aught to which he might object; and neither years nor motherhood brought her self-reliance.

Mrs. Bancroft was loth to admit it even to herself; but Ellen D'Anyer had never quite recovered from the effects of the wetting she had given her twelve years before. Her imprudent and impetuous young husband, too excited to reason, had hurried her away at Mrs. Bancroft's harsh bidding, drenched as she was and though he hailed the first sedan chair they met, there were three parts of a mile to traverse between Red Bank and Cannon-street, and explanations to follow, before dry garments could be substituted. Rheumatic fever was a natural sequence, and life-

long delicacy ; mental suffering having been superadded to the physical. Her long illness had, however, been borne with patient resignation, and had served to draw her nearer to her Creator. The seventeen-years-old wife had laid down her self-will before Muriel was born.

It was therefore with no slight trepidation she awaited, with her tedious boy in her arms, the return of her energetic parent from the warehouse that summer afternoon ; having no clear idea of the proposal to be made, or of her husband's mood to receive it. Nor was she much more assured by the triumphant smile on Mrs. Bancroft's face as she walked into the back sitting room, and bade Muriel "take Sara and her doll into the kitchen."

"Well, it is settled," she began ; "I am to find you a respectable and capable nursemaid, and Muriel is to be turned over to me."

"You are not going to take Muriel from me," put in Mrs. John D'Anyer faintly.

"Yes, I am ; so have her box packed by this day week. I'll see you have a nurse before then ; and, by the by, put nothing in that is half worn. I'll see she has a fresh rig out before she goes."

"Goes where ?" asked the wondering young mother.

"Why, to Chester, with me. Did I not tell you I was going to send her to school ?"

Mrs. John D'Anyer's heart sank. She dearly loved her first-born, if the father did not ; and the announcement was like a sentence of banishment to her.

"Chester ! Oh, mother, surely there are good schools in Manchester ; you would not send the dear girl so far away. And such a dangerous road—that terrible forest to cross. How could she ever come home for her holidays ?"

"She will have no holidays. You need not look so blank. I will see to the lass. And I'll get thy father's kinsman, the Rev. Thomas Bancroft, to look after her ; so she'll be well off, for he's a good man, and a learned one. She would only be put upon at home ; be at everyone's beck and call ; be nursemaid and scapegoat for the whole lot, and I've set my mind on making a clever woman of her. Ay, and a happy one into the bargain. She is going amongst ladies, to be treated like a lady. I'll see to that."

Tears sprang to the mother's eyes.

"Now, don't be silly," cried the observant grandmother ; "the child's not gone yet, and won't go till Chester Fair ; so there's all the time between this and Michaelmas to reconcile yourself,

if you are so foolish as to need reconciling, to a change which is for her good."

"But what of Muriel? It will break her tender heart!"

"Leave her to me; there shall be no breaking of hearts. I'll see to that. There might be some breaking of backs if she stayed here much longer. And now call her in, and let us have tea. John will be in directly."

During this colloquy Marion and Anna, the one nine and the other seven, had come skipping home from school; but, kept in check by Muriel with grandmother's cherries and cakes, had remained discreetly in the large bright kitchen. And as children were seldom permitted to take tea with their elders, there was no hardship in sitting down at the round oak table to their brown bread and cans of milk, whilst father, mother, and grandmother drank tea and ate white bread and butter in the parlour; and, unknown to them, two strong minds strove to convince a weak but warm-hearted mother that it was well the daughter she loved should be taken from her.

The hardship came to the children a week afterwards, when Sister Muriel went to stay with Grandmother Bancroft, and a stout girl of fifteen, rough and ready in her handling of them, was the only substitute. They had no forecast of the longer parting in store, yet they cried themselves to sleep.

Nor had Muriel when she was sent every morning up Red Bank for a draught of new milk at the farmhouse by the stocks, "to bring a colour into her cheeks," as her grandmother said; or even when she was measured for her new frocks and shoes and bonnets and caps, and was provided with a fur muff and tippet of grey squirrel, and was told that she was going with Grandmother Bancroft to Chester Fair.

Chester Fair! Did not her father and uncles talk of it, and the business down there, for weeks before and after? and had she not seen the preparations made for her father's departure, the packing of his saddle bags, the loading of his pistols? Surely it was a great event to her, a something to look forward to with glee. Muriel had no prescience and no fears. But the tender mother had; and though she had been enjoined to say nothing, and to let the child go away quietly; and though she knew that Muriel was dearer to "Grandmother Bancroft" than all her possessions, and that the resolute old lady was actuated by a sincere desire to promote the child's welfare, she could not let her go under a false impression, to waken to reality among strangers, and that without a word of farewell warning and counsel.

She took the opportunity when Muriel, taller, stronger, and rosier for her four months' residence and rambles in the fresh air and green fields around Red Bank—the latter shared with Milly Hargreaves, a favourite cousin whose father's dyeworks lay between Red Bank and the River Irk—was permitted to spend a couple of days in Broom-street prior to the eagerly anticipated journey to Chester Fair.

Never to be forgotten by Muriel so long as she lived, was that hour with her mother in the privacy of her chamber, an hour dark as was the mahogany furniture and heavy moreen draperies, for there she first learned that her journey to Chester was not a mere pleasure trip. It was sad for both; not that the Misses Briscoe's school had terrors for Muriel, or to Mrs. John D'Anyer; it had been painted in the brightest tints; but the parting, the separation for a long and uncertain period, the distance which must lie between them, had. And to understand this, it must be known that in 1789 there was no direct conveyance for passengers between Manchester and Chester. Goods were sent on pack horses, or by the Duke of Bridgewater's new canal; and horse-drawn packet boats which met a stage coach three miles from Frodsham, were also provided for the accommodation of passengers. Otherwise the ordinary stage-coach went no farther than Northwich, and people who did not travel on horseback must hire a postchaise or a cart, and run the risk of highwaymen and footpads on their route through Delamere Forest, if they wished to reach the Palatine city.

These dangers had been too often discussed in Muriel's presence to leave her ignorant. There could be no home-coming at stated times, and her young heart sank; but when she saw how her dearly-loved mother was overpowered, she put a brave face upon it, and said "perhaps father or grandmother might bring her mother over to see her at fair time." She knew that her grandmother Bancroft had a relation in Chester, a clergyman, the head master of the Grammar School there, and had been told that he would be sure to come and see her; still, he was not her mother, and her mother was all the world to her.

She grew grave and sober as her mother exhorted her to "hold fast by the hand of Christ at all times and in all seasons, whether tried, or tempted, or troubled, and never to let it go." And then her mother put into her hands a thickly-bound black volume with massive silver clasps, on which were engraved D.M., 1711, the same initials and date being stamped in gold on either side. "Take this, my child," she said; "it is the most precious token of my love that I can bestow upon you—the Bible and Prayer

Book of our ancestress Deborah Massey; it was her constant companion, the law of her life. Make it yours, Muriel, and I shall never regret this day. The book has been handed down as a precious treasure; it has been such to me, let it be such to you.

The tears of the mother and daughter mingled on the black cover and on the silver clasps, as the arms of Muriel went round that mother's neck in a clasp as close, and a kiss of assurance sealed the promise that she gave.

CHAPTER III.

TRAVELLERS.

DELAMERE Forest and Chester Fair! There was a promise of romance and mystery in the one, of pleasure in the other. What girl of Muriel's age but would have looked forward with excitement and anticipation.

It was a sad damper to learn that the romance of the hazardous journey, the show and delights of the great fair, were to terminate in the reality of a strange boarding school, and long absence from home and the mother she loved so dearly.

Gratitude to Grandmother Bancroft, which had been bubbling up from the deep fountain in her breast, as one new garment after another had come from the mantua maker, and her handsome furs from the warehouse, sank to a low ebb when she learned the hidden motive for so much preparation. It was not in her nature to demur openly, but she said to herself over and over again: "But for mother, I might have gone away without knowing! It was not kind of Grandmother Bancroft! It was *not kind*. How *could* she do it?"

Her murmurings were, however, stilled by the remembrance that her own mother had said "it was for her good, and that it was very kind of grandmother to take the charge and expense of Muriel's wardrobe and education on herself." "If mother thinks it is good for me, I suppose I *ought* to be satisfied; and if grandmother really means it for the best, it is ungrateful to grumble. Only it is *so far*! Well, as mother says, the Lord can hear me, and see me, and care for me in Chester as well as here, and for them too!" but she had her fears, misgivings, and regrets, nevertheless.

It was in such mood Muriel watched her Grandmother Bancroft as she packed new linen and new frocks in a small trunk, covered with mottled cowhide, whereon her initials "M.D.," shone in all the glory of brass nails.

"Who gave thee this?" asked Mrs. Bancroft, as the girl tendered the silver-clasped Bible to be packed.

"Mother," was the answer, "and, see, the letters on the back are the same as those on the box."

"I think Ellen might have set more store by Deborah Massey's Bible than to give it thee. But see thah takes care of it, and use it well."

She did not say, "Make good use of it," *that* did not occur to her.

"But how is my box to go, Grandmother?" asked Muriel, as the key was turned in the lock, and canvas fitted as a cover; "if I am to ride on a pillion behind Uncle Sam, our horse could not carry it, and yours will have the saddle bags. Will one of the pack horses take it?"

"No, lass! I've done with pack horses, thank goodness! Your box will go to-morrow along with the bales of furs and peltry to the wharfinger of the Duke's canal, and be sent by boat to Frodsham, or nigh it, and on by carrier's wagon to the Manchester Hall in Chester; the new hall that thy Grandfather D'Anyer, and me, and your uncles, and other Manchester folk have gone shares to build."

So saying, Mrs. Bancroft sent the packing needle on its last errand through the canvas, drew the stitch tight with a business-like jerk, cut it away with the scissors at her girdle, and rose from her knees.

Muriel was curious.

"How did you manage, Grandmother, before the hall was built?"

"How? Why, as best we could. Showed our goods in booths in the streets, as had been done for years before, or kept them at our inns, and looked out for customers. But that didn't suit me. I said I'd see about it, and now we've a fine hall to cover us."

"Hundreds of years!" Muriel had ejaculated, but Mrs. Bancroft's task completed, she had no mind to linger. She was wanted in the warehouse, else she might have told Muriel that fairs were of very ancient date, and had their origin in the wants and necessities of the people; and that of the early English fairs, established and chartered for the sale or interchange of goods and produce, or for the hiring of men and maid-servants at a period

when towns and villages were scattered and far apart, roads few and unsafe, Chester Fair was one of the earliest, and in best repute. Its charter dated back almost to the days of Hugh Lupus, the first Earl of Chester, who held his rich Palatinate by grant from his near kinsman, William the Conqueror. Chester was an important seaport then, and needed a strong hand to fortify the castle the Romans had left, as well as to protect the commerce of the Dee from the pirates swarming in the Irish Channel. She might have told how the monks of St. Werburgh had represented "mysteries" or "miracle plays," to edify and keep from mischief the idle multitudes who thronged to the fair for sport, of which the more modern show was the outcome; and how none but freemen of the city were permitted to trade within its walls except when a white glove was hung out from the tower of St. Peter's, as a symbol of peace, of the native trade, and of the fair. And she might have justified her own special business at Chester Fair with an old chronicler's summary of its merchandise:—

Hides and fish, salmon, hake, herringe,
Irish wool and linen cloth, faldinge;
And martens good, be her marchandie,
Hartes hides, and other of venerie,
Skins of otter, squirrel and Irish hose,
Of sheep, lamb, and foxe, is her chaffare,
Fells of kids and conies great plenty.

But she could not have told or foretold how "kettles o' steam" would go whizzing and fizzing over the land with a besom of progression in their train, to sweep such chartered fairs clean away as nuisances, not conveniences.

She had told the girl at various times quite sufficient about Chester, its fairs, and its double rows of shops, where the covered pathway to the upper row was right over the roofs of the lower set, above which the prominent house fronts formed a sort of arcade; quite enough to put the looming school in the background, and after the first tears of parting were dried, to cause Muriel to sit her pillion lightly, and to clasp her Uncle Sam's waist in hopeful mood, and with a smile on her cheerful countenance.

But Muriel had never mounted a pillion before; the journey was long and tedious; the roads were woefully uneven beneath the horse's feet, and long ere they reached Northwich she was sick with the jolting, and her face proclaimed it. Samuel grumbled hard at the loss of time and money, when his mother announced her intention to remain at the Unicorn until the next morning on the lass's account.

"It's not as if you was going right through to Chester," he urged; "it's only seven or eight miles to Eddisbury, and you know the Kingsleys expect you. When Muriel has had a good dinner and a horn of home-brewed, she'll be as right as ninepence, I'll warrant."

It was not customary in the last century to discuss business before young people, or make them privy to the plans of their elders, and Muriel took the sharp "Sam!" and the significant frown of her grandmother, as a reminder that she was present, and need not be enlightened; but Samuel, keen and sharp where his own interest was concerned, took it as a hint there were strangers in the room, and that it was not wise to prate of their path so openly.

Irritated as much at his own thoughtlessness as at the rebuke, he rubbed his hands smartly over his breeches' thighs, indulged in a brief whistle, and rising, said:

"Hang it, what a while they are with that dinner! I'll go and have a look at the horses, and see no tricks are played with them or their feed. One need be sharp in this world!" and the cunning look in his greenish-grey eyes said people need be very sharp indeed to take *him* in. At the door he turned round to say, "And if the lass be so desperately tired let her lie down on yon settle by the wall, if its cushion's soft enough," a hint Muriel scarcely liked to take before strangers.

But her grandmother's quick "I'll see to that" settled the business, and she lay down, with a saddle-bag for a pillow, glad to rest, and in the sense of repose soon forgot the strangeness of all around, the farmers and others by the fire. Then she began to wonder if she also was expected at Eddisbury, and what sort of people the Kingsleys were, and what sort of a place the Forest House was, and to think how funny it was she should be going there after all her wonder about it. She had heard it spoken of many a time, but curiosity was a crime in that generation (and the next). "Don't ask questions; children should be seen and not heard," being the general stopper on a thirst for knowledge.

She had a hazy recollection of being told by someone it was "only an old, rambling farmhouse," and very likely her informant had no acquaintance with its history, and could have told her no more. But that old, rambling, picturesque, black-and-white, timber-and-rubble Forest House, of which scarcely a vestige remains for the antiquary, occupied the site of an older edifice still, the stronghold of the wise Ethelfleda, the daughter of King Alfred, the wife and widow of Ethelred, King of Mercia, the sister and counsellor of King Edward. Here, on a lofty

elevation, in the very centre of the great forest, she, whom the old chroniclers call "the wisest of women," founded what she held to be an impregnable city, strengthening it with earthworks, traces of which remain, and with palisades, of which only the name is left. The eleven thickly-wooded acres which had held Ethelfleda's strong city of Eddisbury, still retain the title of the Old Pale, and the "old farmhouse" Muriel was about to visit dated back to times when Delamere Forest was a chase for the ancient Earls of Chester, and the chief custodian of the red and fallow deer held the so-called Chamber of the Forest, with a band of subordinates to assist in the maintenance of the forest laws, and his own privileges. This was even before James the First knighted the Chief Forester, or confirmed the appointment to Sir John Done and his heirs for ever, and so the Forest House to which Muriel was wending had, like the forest itself, seen its palmy days depart, and was not merely old, but ancient. But paint and whitewash covered up the wrinkles of time, and it still showed a good front to the world from that coign of 'vantage, "the storied hill of Eddisbury."

Nothing of this had floated into Muriel's dreams, when she was startled from a doze by the return of her Uncle Sam and his exclamation, "No sign of dinner yet, and two o'clock? It seems there are some fine folk upstairs, mother, who came in yon chaise before the door, and there's been such a fuss made over getting dinner for them all in a hurry, that plain tradesfolk that travel on horseback must e'en be content to wait. Oh! you're here at last," he cried, as the hostess herself came in close at his heels to lay the cloth, and apologise for keeping old customers waiting; but "the lady who came in the yellow chaise," she said, "was ill, and sick folk must be minded first."

"So they must," assented Mrs. Bancroft, "and I've been in no hurry. I wanted this little lass to have a good spell of rest before her dinner."

Muriel was too much shaken to eat a good dinner, she felt as if all her bones had been dislocated; the hour's rest had not refreshed her much more than the repast; but she was unwilling to cause unpleasantness or disconcert her grandmother's arrangements, so, when the meal was over, she answered Samuel's "Well, are you ready?" with a smile and a prompt assent, and stifled a sigh of weariness as she stepped up on the horse-block, to resume her seat on the pillion, well repaid by her grandmother's look of satisfaction; though if she had obeyed her own inclination she would have preferred to stay where she was.

She was aware that Mr. Kingsley was the Chief Forester of

Delamere, and that her grandmother, who had large dealings with him, carried a silver whistle in the shape of a horn, which had been given to her as a token, but until Uncle Samuel had spoken she had no idea they were going to the Forest House. It was a relief to learn they were not going on to Chester that afternoon. And Sam was in haste to get to their journey's end before dusk, as the road was not too lively, and not in too good repute.

Mrs. Bancroft had a small freehold property at Waverham, on the north-east border of the forest, which required her supervision, and for this and other reasons, she had set out a full fortnight before Michaelmas, and a week prior to the fair. A few days later the road would be alive with travellers of all sorts and conditions wending towards the same goal. As it was—though the postchaise had left the inn not ten minutes before themselves—only a stray pedlar, a labouring man, children nutting or black-berrying, or a farmer on horseback, were to be passed upon the road; and when once they were fairly in the forest, notwithstanding the clearness of the afternoon and the mellow tints of the autumnal foliage, there was a sharp breeze which swept the deep waters of the meres into mimic waves, rustled over the waving fronds of reddening fern, went singing and sighing through the trees, driving the brown and yellow leaves in showers around them, and somehow revived the mysterious influence of the old tales she had so often listened to at home.

Yet as they rode steadily and slowly along the ascending road, past wide stretches of boggy moss, or yellow broom, undulating pasture, billowy brake, or low copse where trees were sparse, her mind was disabused of the idea that a forest was a dense, impenetrable mass of trees, such as she had read of in an old book at home, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table sought adventures in. Still there were giant oaks and stately elms, and graceful birch, and smooth-boled amber-tinted beeches massed together here and there between, and in the distance might wooded Eddisbury be seen like a dark cloud of firs against the opaline sky. And as high overhead a pair of wild ducks took their flight from mere to mere, or a crested grebe on whirring wing obeyed the call of an expectant mate, or a frightened hare or rabbit scuttled away for safety amongst the herbage, or a solitary lapwing, trying the speed of its thin legs against their horses', broke the stillness with the sharp "pee-wheet, pee-wheet" of maternal care; all these sights and sounds unwonted told the town girl they were intruders on nature's domain; and that where was a covert for deer was a covert also for men of evil deed and evil fame.

She clung closer to her uncle in silence, not because he was a favourite, but because she was timid as well as tired ; and as they passed moss and mere she scarcely heard her grandmother whilst pointing to places on their route, say "That's Massey Lodge you've heard tell of." "This is Crabtree Green," "Yon's the Plague Hole, where the dead were buried," and so on, for very weariness and apprehension, not allayed when Samuel Bancroft—who could feel her trembling even through his thick riding coat—in a spirit of mischief pointed with his whip ahead to the right with the remark, "And yonder's the Thieves' Moss, Muriel. It lies in the corner where th' roads meet." Was not the very name significant ?

If in her unselfishness she had complied with her uncle's wish, and ignored her own fatigue rather than be a cause of expense and delay to her grandmother, she began to think it might have been as well to have accepted her kind offer and have remained at the inn, and to fancy the afternoon was closing prematurely, and that a robber was lurking behind every tree and bush.

All at once, as if it had been whispered in her soul, came the recollection : "Mother has often said father was as safe in the forest as in the town if God's angels had him in their keeping ;" and there was strength in the inspiration, not of body, but of mind. The road was too rugged and uneven to let the body rest.

They skirted the moss with the evil name until the Chester road was crossed by another which led uphill to the dense woods of the Old Pale, where was situated the Forest House whither they were bound. Here they turned at a sharp angle, still keeping the Thieves' Moss to their right, and had gone several paces forward when something like a scream broke the stillness.

Horses and riders pricked up their ears. Muriel's heart stood still.

"It is only an owl," cried matter-of-fact Samuel. "Let us get on."

"I tell thee it's a woman," insisted his mother. "We'd best see into it," as a second and more terrified scream, blent with a confusion of sounds, came in confirmation on the breeze.

Without waste of words mother and son turned their steeds back, and after a moment's deliberation urged the tired beasts along the winding road towards Chester. In less than three minutes they sighted an overturned chaise, to which the restive horses were threatening destruction ; obviously the one which had been re-horsed in Northwich, from its conspicuous yellow body and the luggage strapped behind.

"Oh! the poor lady!" cried Muriel, her dread of robbers vanishing before this real disaster. "And I'm sure she was ill. I saw her face as they drove off."

In another minute they were on the spot, their bridles hitched to a bough, Samuel cutting away at the traces with his clasp-knife and shouting to the postillion to keep his plunging horses steady. Mrs. Bancroft's ready hand unfastened the door of the over-turned chaise, and a fine man in military undress, whose right arm was in a sling, struggled forth with her aid.

"I thank you, madame," said he with the politeness of habit; "but oh, my poor wife and son! I fear they are killed!" and as he spoke, in tones of deepest emotion, he bent to look within the chaise, and called anxiously, "Celia! Arthur!"

"I am not killed, sir," answered a voice from within; and as the head of the speaker, a handsome youth of sixteen, emerged from the vehicle, Muriel clasped her hands in a tremor of shuddering dismay, for a line of blood ran from a wound down the side of his face. "I was only stunned, but I fear my mother is more seriously hurt. She is quite insensible. Will some one assist me to raise her?"

Samuel Bancroft stepped forward. The horses were cut loose, and the postillion kept them aloof, but the chaise was a wreck, the officer disabled, the lady to all appearance dead or dying, and the evening closing in.

"What is to be done?" ejaculated the gentleman, in trouble and perplexity, without any hope of a solution.

"I'll see to that," said Mrs. Bancroft, briskly, as she withdrew her head from the chaise. Up to her lips went the silver whistle slung from her neck, and at once over moss and mere, brake and thicket, went out a quick succession of throbbing notes clear as the ring of a bugle, and echo seemed to catch up the tones and send them back from near and far; and presently, as if in answer to the call, along the rutty road, over the dusky sward, forth from copse and woodland, one figure after another loomed dimly through the mist and came towards them at a run.

At the first note of the whistle the officer had started in apprehension. "Was this break-down a plot to rob them, and this hard-featured woman in league with highwaymen?" he thought; but he cast his eyes on the pitiful face of Muriel, and was reassured.

Mrs. Bancroft had seen his startled look, and answered it.

"Eh! we are peaceful travellers, sir; you need not be alarmed. I carry this whistle as a safeguard, for I have been hard beset in this forest myself before now. It was the gift of

the head forester—and here come the keepers to protect or assist their master's friend."

One by one as the men came up, each armed with gun and hunting knife, doffed his cap to Mrs. Bancroft, as if in respectful recognition.

The situation was apparent enough. Samuel Bancroft and the youth between them had with some difficulty managed to extricate the lady from the broken chaise, and on its cushions, placed by Muriel on the grass by the roadside, she lay with her eyes closed, still insensible, her husband bending over her, and Muriel chafing her small white hands as a restorative, her own face pale as that under the hood of the injured lady.

Mrs. Bancroft and her son held a brief conference with the keepers. The officer was spoken to.

The postillion rode back ruefully to Northwich with orders, not merely concerning his carriage, but to offer a heavy fee in the name of Captain Wynne, of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, to a doctor to stimulate his speedy attendance at Eddisbury.

The captain stripped off his crimson scarf of netted silk with the remark that he "never thought it would be put to such sad service," and it was spread to form a litter for his wife, whose only sign of life was a quiver of the nostrils, a momentary rising of the eyelids when Samuel Bancroft poured a few drops from his spirit flask between the white lips.

The captain's son, though he had made light of his injuries from broken glass, was not sorry when Muriel offered to bind up his bleeding head, and Mr. Bancroft passed the flask to him, with the hint "have a good pull at that, and then you had better mount Ball and take charge of my niece. You don't seem in fettle for a long walk."

The luggage was unstrapped, and mounted on broad shoulders; but as there were four or five keepers, and Mr. Bancroft offered to lend a hand at the litter, one of them set off by a short cut to apprise Mrs. Kingsley of the coming guests, expected and unexpected, and the procession moved forward as quickly as care would permit; Captain Wynne by the side of the litter with his wife's hand in his own; Mrs. Bancroft riding in advance and keeping her eye not so much on steady-going Ball as on his new rider, behind whom Muriel had been mounted.

She was afraid lest he might faint and lose his seat from loss of blood, and bring Muriel down with him; but of any connection between the handsome young stranger and her grandchild beyond the courtesy and service of the hour, she had not a scintillation in her brain.

As for Muriel, she was, in the sight of Arthur Wynne, just a good-natured, tender-hearted child who had done what she could for himself and mother, the mother whose peril absorbed all his thoughts and interest; and Muriel's too, for that matter. The untoward accident had put shyness and timidity to flight, and called forth all the pitiful tenderness of her nature; personal fear and fatigue were forgotten, whilst anxiety for the strangers amongst whom she had been thrown, blent with rejoicing that she had not yielded to her own sense of weariness at Northwich, and so detained her grandmother.

Mist rising from mere and moss had met the descending twilight, blotting out the brushwood and the road before them; but the veil on the forest path was not so deep as that which hid the future path of life from all.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE FOREST HOUSE.

WHEN Sarah Bancroft said "I'll see to it," discussion was at an end; she had put down her foot, and opposition was useless. It had been so in her brief married life, and in the long years of her widowhood. It was so in her household, and in her business. When she said a thing must be done or undone, it was so. When she named a price to give or to take, there was no chaffering, no argument. It must be, or not be. When she had said "I'll see to it," Ellen D'Anyer knew that her daughter was to all intents and purposes taken from her. Mrs. Bancroft's "I'll see to it," meant that she had taken Muriel's future into her hands, as if she had the power and prescience of Deity.

It was true she had done this in the very plenitude of her love for the girl, for, as her own son Samuel knew full well, Sarah Bancroft had warm and susceptible pulses in her breast, though her sharply outlined features bore false witness against it, and she covered up and hid her affections out of sight, as weaknesses to be ashamed of, and kept well under control, as her dominant will kept all around her.

She had never reasoned the matter with herself; but that she was born to rule she had never a doubt, any more than of her own infallibility. She would have acknowledged a Supreme

Ruler had the question been put to her, but no one put the question, and she felt herself sufficient for all things. Her faith was in herself—to herself she was a law. When Captain Wynne's troubled exclamation was answered by her decisive "I'll see to it," and she raised the forester's silver whistle to her lips, it was as though an imperial fiat had gone forth; a guarantee of safety and protection, care for the sick lady, hospitable welcome for all. *She* had so decided, and who should demur?

Certainly the keepers looked one at another, but no one disputed her behests; and if Captain Wynne took all for granted and was profuse in thanks, and Muriel never doubted her grandmother's power and prerogative, Samuel Bancroft did.

He knew that Mrs. Kingsley was an Arden, and never forgot for how many successive generations an ancestor of hers had been "Chief Forester and bow bearer of Delamere," and that she never allowed her husband to forget that it was in *her* right he held the office, even though the Kingsleys had held it first of all. And he felt pretty well assured that no silver whistle would have been granted to his mother without Mrs. Kingsley's full concurrence; but he was equally sure she never contemplated its use in the service of casual wayfarers, and he felt somewhat dubious of their reception.

He was right. The furrier's party had been expected, and for them hospitality had provided its best. But for any additions to that party in the shape of strangers pulled out of a broken-down chaise the forester's wife was not prepared—and not disposed to prepare. For once Mrs. Kingsley's insulted dignity overshadowed her humanity.

"What! bringing a flock of strangers into this house without invitation or permission!" she exclaimed, as the keeper delivered his message. "Does Mrs. Bancroft mistake the Forest House for her own, or for an inn?"

"I think, wife," said Mr. Kingsley astutely, "Sarah Bancroft just took thee for what thou art, a kind-hearted, hospitable woman, too good a manager to be put about my two or three extra visitors, and too good a Samaritan to let a fellow-creature perish by the wayside."

"Indeed!" was all her response, though she muttered to herself "Surely the inn at Kelsall might have served their turn."

Her husband's two shots had failed to bring dignity down from its perch, and she lost sight of humanitarian necessity in her desire to teach Sarah Bancroft a lesson.

A large wood fire was blazing and sputtering on the stone hearth in the large square entrance hall, where stags' heads and

antlers were interspersed with other trophies of the chase—bows and arrows, hunting whips and horns, fowling pieces and shot-belts, as decorations on its walls of panelled oak, with a primitive oil lamp or two on brackets to show their glories off. A carved oak settle and its table, with a few straight-backed oaken chairs, ranged against the walls, were all the furniture, but two great hounds lay basking before the fire on a deerskin rug, and the atmosphere was redolent of venison and hare and other savouries.

The wide door stood open, the light streamed a welcome out to friends and to strangers; the Chief Forester pressed forward to greet the former and to give hospitable assurance to the latter; the very dogs rose from the hearth to salute the new comers; but Mrs. Kingsley, in her green silk quilted petticoat and overgown, stood frigidly apart with folded hands, to mark her sense of the intrusion; and for once Mrs. Bancroft found her sagacity and sufficiency at fault.

Even Captain Wynne saw there was some misunderstanding, and pressed forward to apologise; but Mrs. Kingsley chanced to catch a glimpse of the pale face of the lady in the litter as she was borne in and laid on the oaken settle, and of the stained bandage above the equally pale face of the youth by her side, and all her womanly sympathy was aroused on the instant.

As she approached the litter she answered the apologist, to the utter exclusion of the others, "I can understand, sir, you were misled; but be under no concern for this lady, she shall have every attention, although this is *not* an inn, and the influx of so many guests was not anticipated." Then with the same unwonted loftiness, turning her head, "Mrs. Bancroft, I trust you are willing to surrender *your* room to the lady *you have brought?*" and she laid an emphasis on the closing words.

"Of course I am, or I should *not* have brought her here. And I brought them all here on the strength of your hospitality and goodness to me on a like occasion when I was a stranger. If I've made a mistake we can settle it afterwards."

And there is no question that they did settle it together afterwards; but for that night Mrs. Kingsley was on her mettle to prove herself a good hostess and a kind nurse.

Muriel might have been unnoticed amidst it all had she not followed Mrs. Wynne's bearers up the stairs and along the gallery which overlooked the hall, to the ready chamber, her weariness forgotten in her desire to be of service, and taking Mrs. Kingsley by surprise by her aptitude and readiness in administering such restoratives as were at hand, and her

delicacy of touch whilst helping to disrobe the lady, whose wrist was injured, and hung helpless.

And what a bright face was hers when she bore the intelligence to the anxious father and son, "Mrs. Wynne has come to herself, and asked for you." Who then observed that it was seamed and scarred? Had not her glad tidings irradiated and beautified her countenance? Did she not seem to them one of the good angels that walk the earth in disguise?

Something of the kind glanced through the mind of Mrs. Kingsley, when Muriel, perceiving how she was distracted between her duties as hostess and her cares for the invalid, volunteered to remain with the sick lady until the doctor came, so that others might go in to supper.

"I can attend to Mrs. Wynne by myself; I am not afraid, and I am not hungry," she said, adding, "and the doctor will surely be here soon."

Mrs. Kingsley had certainly been troubled about the long-delayed supper and the spoiling viands, but as she went across the wide gallery and down the brook oak staircase, she thought to herself what a patient little maiden she had left behind in the big bedroom hung with tapestry, and full of flickering shadows, as the firelight rose and fell without reaching its remote corners.

And some remark of the kind she made as she took her place at the long table in the dining room on the right of the hall, which had been set more than an hour with the whitest of homespun napery, the brightest of silver tankards and Sheffield cutlery, and where drinking horns with silver rims flanked the horn-hafted knives and two-pronged forks instead of glasses.

"As composed and observant as a woman," she said, "and not at all afraid to be left alone with Mrs. Wynne, in that strange room, away from us all."

"She was timid enough as we came through the forest," interjected Samuel Bancroft, with something like a grin; "I've a notion she fancied there was a robber hiding in every bush."

"Then thou hadst frightened her!" said his mother across the table, "and there was no need of that: she had heard of Delamere before to-day."

"Hidden dangers are apt to impress the imagination, sir," put in the captain, resting his fork; "I have known men who never blenched before the fire of the enemy, shrink from the shadows of a dark room; the little lady must be naturally brave."

"She removed a splinter of glass, and bound up my head, without any show of either fear or repugnance," added the captain's son.

"She seems a born nurse," then said Mrs. Kingsley, as though in praise, as she helped Samuel to a second slice of venison.

"A born nurse! I hope she was born for something better!" quoth Mrs. Bancroft, bridling. "I'll see that Muriel D'Anyer is no nurse."

"I think you misunderstood, madam," the captain began.

"Oh, no! I did not," she answered. "I'm taking her——"

But the doctor—whose name was Holmes, a little fat, pudgy, round-faced man—coming at that instant—the rest of Mrs. Bancroft's speech was lost.

The captain was too anxious about his wife to continue at the board, and though with an ill grace at the interruption, Mrs. Kingsley held him excused.

Mrs. Wynne was discovered to be suffering from a broken wrist, and from severe shock to her system, already enfeebled.

"She will not be in fit state for removal for many days, and will require the utmost attention, if she is to be removed at all. But she is in good hands."

So said the doctor; but he knew nothing of the irritation of Mrs. Kingsley at having the patient thrown on her hands in such a matter-of-course way, to say nothing of the additional husband and son, when she had calculated on a long gossip with her old crony, and a budget of news from the outer world.

Good part of the forester's income was derived from his perquisites in the matter of skins, and his wife's indignation at the use Mrs. Bancroft had made of the silver whistle, intended as a safeguard to herself, had annoyed him greatly, Mrs. Bancroft had for many years bought so largely from him. He was a good-natured fellow, and was pleased at supper time to find that matters had adjusted themselves comfortably.

Judge then his annoyance when Mrs. Kingsley broke in on a business conference, held in the malodorous skin store the next morning, with Mrs. Bancroft and her son, just as the prices and quantity of deer, squirrel, marten, and fox skins had been settled, and the question how many hundred hare and rabbit skins should be supplied at a given rate was under consideration.

The morning opinion of the Northwich doctor had been promulgated, and Mrs. Kingsley came, in anything but the best of humours, to vent her indignation at being "saddled with the care and cost of an invalid and her relatives, for no one knows how long."

"Would you have had the poor woman die in the forest?" asked Mrs. Bancroft.

"Certainly not!" was the tart reply.

"Then be as thankful for the chance of saving *her* life," answered the other, "as you were when you took charge of me, and as for the cost——"

"Why, make a bill out, and ask the captain to settle it," thrust in Samuel, who had always an eye to the money; and thought that a very plain solution of the difficulty.

Mrs. Kingsley drew herself up, and her nose curled "As if we were innkeepers," said she.

"Here, Mr. Kingsley," said Mrs. Bancroft, "take your whistle," and she released it from her neck. "You'd best have it back, as I don't know when to use it. Sam, go and see the horses saddled, we'll be off to Waverham at once. And we'll take Muriel with us. If we're not expected till to-morrow it won't matter much there. But before we go I'd better seek out the captain, and let him know that I've made a mistake for once in my life; and *I'll* see about hiring a nurse in Waverham, if there's no objection to *that*."

And off Mrs. Bancroft set towards the house, greatly to the chagrin of both Mr. Kingsley and his wife, who followed her with entreaties to return. He was afraid to lose a good customer, his discomfited spouse to have the truth blurted out to Captain Wynne all too bluntly. She was not an unkindly woman in the main, and had grumbled more to "put Sarah Bancroft down," than from any lack of Christian kindness towards the sick stranger.

Samuel slapped his thigh in satisfaction as he looked after them from the door of the outbuilding—a place fitted with louvre-board windows to admit air. "Egad, Mistress Kingsley is caught in her own trap now! I'd back my mother against her any day! But I must be off after the horses if she's made up her mind to go."

Then he stopped short, and, as if he had hurt his thigh in slapping it, rubbed it slowly and ruefully. "Whew!" he half whistled to himself, "suppose we're in th' wrong box in Waverham too; an' it's like enough if Lydia's none prepared. It's awkward anyhow," and he went on his errand slowly enough.

Captain Wynne was found pacing the stone floor of the entrance hall, his left hand supporting the arm in the sling, shaken when the chaise overturned, his head down, his mind a chaos of anxiety and perplexity. The precarious state of his wife; the wound in the head of his son, which threatened to prove troublesome; his own helplessness, the result of a duel with a fellow-officer, were sufficient causes, without the conscious-

ness that they were trespassing, still further to chafe the proud man, who was accustomed to command and to control; and found himself cast like a straw upon a stream, through the mere loosening of a linch pin.

He had entrusted to Mr. Holmes, the surgeon, who had undertaken the charge, money and a letter, to be despatched post-haste to Chester for his own servants. They had been "sent on as couriers in advance to have all things prepared at the Blossoms Inn," he said, "and would be themselves uneasy and all at sea."

The announcement of Mrs. Bancroft's sudden departure took him by surprise. Somehow, though she did *not* suggest it, he felt answerable for the change in her plans. He had, whilst pacing to and fro, observed Mrs. Kingsley intercept Mrs. Bancroft in a side passage, and hold her as if in argument, where the former seemed to urge and the other to resist compliance.

"I am convinced we are trespassing here," he said, as both women came into the Hall together, "yet with my poor wife's life hanging on a thread I see not how it is to be remedied. What compensation I can make to our excellent host and hostess for this intrusion on their privacy, and to your little grandchild for her tender ministrations——"

"We seek no compensation," began Mrs. Kingsley loftily.

"My grandchild's done her duty, Captain Wynne, and that's her reward," interrupted Mrs. Bancroft stiffly. "But Muriel's going, and I came to ask if I had not better hire a nurse in Waverham, one you can pay out of your purse, and who can wait upon Mrs. Wynne night and day."

"Miss D'Anyer going? I'm sorry for that. My son, who is upstairs with her and his mother now, tells me that she is the tenderest of young nurses, one of the sweetest creatures that ever entered a sick room. I am sure my wife will miss her greatly. I should say that I have already sent to Chester for Mrs. Wynne's own maid, but if—of course with Mrs. Kingsley's sanction—you do not mind the trouble of finding a suitable attendant, you will add greatly——"

"If my servants and myself are insufficient, you are at liberty to do as you please in sending for your own, Captain," interrupted Mrs. Kingsley; "but don't you, Mrs. Bancroft, send Maggy Blackburn into *my* house," and she turned on her heel as if she considered the proposition a fresh indignity.

Now, Maggy Blackburn was precisely the nurse contemplated by the furrier, but, though a skilled attendant on the sick as times went, and a village doctress of more than local repute, she

had two not over-reputable sons, men suspected of a liking for game and other property not their own—they were in very ill odour at the forester's.

There was a window with a wide seat at each side of the entrance; into one of these the captain flung himself as the very sport of fate, bitterly lamenting the mischance of the broken chaise, nay, even the humiliating intervention of Mrs. Bancroft—and she was on her way upstairs to summon Muriel to depart, when in through the passage burst Mr. Kingsley, his brown face lit up with excitement.

"I say, Captain, you may thank God your chaise broke down when it did, and that the Bancrofts were at hand to bring you here!"

"Indeed!" interjected the captain, in a tone not altogether free from incredulity.

"Ay, that you may! A traveller was plundered and well-nigh murdered by two ruffians last night—not half a mile further up the road."

"Hah!" cried the officer, with amazement on his face.

"He was speechless," continued the forester, "when one of our keepers found him there battered and bleeding, with his pockets inside out. And it was all Whitely and another man could do to get him to the inn at Kelsall. He had come to himself before they left him, but I hear he's in a bad way. He must have had a horse, for he had a whip in his hand, but the horse was gone. Helped the footpads to make off, I reckon. *You* had a narrow and most providential escape."

A providential escape! and he had been questioning the ways of the Most High, as he had chafed and fretted in his walk on that stone floor. A providential escape indeed! A mercy not to be forgotten!

"We may, indeed, be thankful," he said seriously. "But cannot something be done for the injured traveller?"

"Well, I'm just off to see what can be done for him, and who he is. A man with empty pockets is like to find cold comfort at an inn. Though he might be worse off than where he is."

"I shall be glad to bear you company, sir," then said the officer to the forester, "and to hold the inn-keeper indemnified in case the poor fellow be unable to pay. And—if you will allow me—I should like to reward the humanity of your keepers. I owe them something on my own account."

"Tut! Tut!" said the other as a put off, but Captain Wynne was not a man to be put off, as the keepers afterwards discovered.

The news spread quickly. Not one of the travellers but felt there was an escape to be thankful for.

"I expect that breakdown was planned," said Samuel; "I half fancied the rogue of a postillion was playing tricks with his horses, forcing them back on the chaise, and now I am sure of it. My hat to a button if that chap was not playing into the hands of the robbers. Belike going shares!"

"Robbers! Then there were robbers after all!" cried Muriel, clasping her hands when she heard. Oh, how glad I am that we did not stay at Northwich! and that grandmother had that whistle! Oh, Mr. Arthur, if robbers had attacked you it would have killed your mother with the fright, ill as she was! God's angels must have been around her." And she looked reverently up.

"I think they *were*," said he. But he knew not she referred to her own mother's words, and his had a double signification, equally obscure.

Mrs. Kingsley summoned one of the keepers and questioned him; and in the general excitement Sarah Bancroft's departure was retarded. Indeed, to travellers like herself, a violent act of highway robbery such as that was not to be disregarded. She was anxious to learn more, and that prompt measures should be taken to discover the criminals and bring them to justice. The exciting question was still under discussion when Mr. Kingsley and Captain Wynne returned. The latter was much agitated.

"My God! Arthur, what do you think? The poor fellow lying there disfigured and lamed is Norris!"

"Norris?" ejaculated the son in a higher key; "What brought Norris there?"

"Owen's over-anxiety and his own fidelity. They became alarmed when we failed to arrive in the afternoon. At last he mounted and left Chester to meet us. Their idea was that your mother was too ill to proceed; and that his services might be needed. Poor fellow, he has paid dearly for his zeal. The miscreants struck him from his horse, and then rifled his pockets. There was very little worth taking, except his watch, and in their rage they beat him unmercifully. He will never be good for anything as a soldier again!"

"And his horse is gone, Captain," put in Sam, from the oaken settle, "was that worth much?"

"Worth something as a horse, sir, worth nothing in the calculation of loss, where a faithful servant's life is concerned," was the answer, which somewhat took Mr. Samuel aback; at least, he rubbed his knees, and said no more.

Then Captain Wynne expressed his hope that Mrs. Wynne should not be disturbed with the intelligence.

"I think you may trust Miss D'Anyer for that, sir," said his son.

"Miss D'Anyer will not be here, sir," observed Mrs. Bancroft stiffly, once more adjusting her cloak, and making a move.

"I say, you'd best take the whistle back, Mrs. Bancroft," suggested the forester.

"Ay, and make yourself comfortable where you are," asked his wife, more ashamed of herself than she liked to own. "Miss D'Anyer has seen nothing of the Old Pale yet, and I'm sure she will not want to go whilst Mrs. Wynne is in danger; besides, I don't think she could be spared, she is such a helpful little body." She was going to add, "and such a capital nurse," but she remembered the grandmother's indignation at the word, and stopped short in time.

The forester joined his wife in her arguments, and after some little persuasion, to which Sam added an interested word, Mrs. Bancroft, for a marvel, yielded to persuasion, took back the whistle, the horses were unsaddled, she completed her purchases and orders, and when she and Samuel started for Waverham the next day, Muriel was left behind, to her own satisfaction and that of others.

Mrs. Bancroft had seen a finger that was *not hers* directing these events, and pondered over it. But she did not take the lesson very deeply to heart; and went forth on her other errand to control human lives and destinies, as if she had a right Divine.

CHAPTER V.

RED RIDING HOOD AND HER FRIENDS.

MORE than a week had gone by, a week which Muriel devoted to the sick lady, with the solicitude of genuine interest, without asking herself how her services were regarded, or to be required. She was one of those who could not witness suffering without an active desire to alleviate it, one whose simple aim seemed to be to make herself useful to others.

It was nothing to her that Mrs. Wynne accepted her ministrations as one accustomed to homage and attention, one whose

patrician birth entitled her to such service as her inferiors were ready to render. And if Mrs. Wynne considered the child honoured in being allowed to wait upon her, had not Muriel said the same, and meant it.

What knew the lady of the long passages and flight of stairs Muriel trod up and down so frequently on her behalf? or of the wearisome watch in a darkened room, when the sun was shining on the autumnal foliage without, and the twitter of birds as well as the voice of Mr. Kingsley tempted the town girl to stroll with him and Arthur Wynne through the enchanting woodland? Was it not sufficient that she, the daughter of a baronet, recognised the peculiar delicacy of Muriel's touch, and preferred her attendance to that of Mrs. Kingsley or her own maid, Owen, who was now by her side? And when at length able to recline on a couch by the wood fire, was it not enough that she smiled on the gratified young nurse and pressed into her hand a locket rimmed with gold and pearls, in which reposed a coil of her own auburn hair?

Proud indeed was Muriel of the delicate lady's progress towards recovery, and said it; proud too of the souvenir so earnestly pressed upon her; but had she or Sarah Bancroft either had an inkling that the crystal locket with the jewelled rim was tendered *as payment* to cancel an obligation, the one would have laid it down with sorrow, the other flung it back in scorn.

Captain Wynne had chafed under the obligations pressed on him by circumstances, as such; but he had the sense to see the spirit in which services were rendered, and that in their degree the Kingsleys and the Bancrofts were every whit as proud as himself, and he was careful not to wound a feeling he so well understood.

He was liberal to the two keepers whose humane attentions to Norris had kept life in the man, no less than to those others who had rendered him and his personal service; but he saw intuitively that the Kingsleys would be insulted by offers of repayment, and his proud spirit chafed at the dilemma in which he was placed. His own sense of justice told him that he had no right to trespass on the hospitality of strangers; yet here they were quartered on civilians for an indefinite time, and civilians who clearly assumed the rank and position of equals. It was a trial to the pride and independence of the military man, for in those days the inferiority of civilians was the creed and dogma of the army, and he paced the long stone hall by the hour, inwardly rebellious and annoyed, outwardly reserved and silent. In his manner when

addressed he was courteous, gratefully urbane—but there was an evident effort to keep irritation down, and he was not cordial.

The young man alone (after the feebleness consequent on the loss of blood had worn off, and he was no longer compelled to lounge in an easy chair by his mother's bedside, or on the oak settle in the great hall) fraternised with their hospitable entertainers, made friends first with the hounds, then sought initiation into the mysteries of woodcraft, and was equally ready for a day's jaunt with Mr. Kingsley, taking the inn at Kelsall by the way to look in upon Norris and see that he was not neglected, or for a day's sport, and bore the forester company with such an easy acceptance of the situation as put those around him at their ease also. Certainly *he* was at the age of adaptability.

He had insisted on Muriel, whom he had dubbed "Little Red Riding Hood," from the scarlet cloak she wore, joining in a stroll through the park of the Old Pale and over the slopes around Eddisbury on the day before her departure.

"You may safely leave Mrs. Wynne to Owen's care now," he said, "and I am quite of Mrs. Kingsley's opinion that you have been too long shut up with our invalid. A ramble through the woods will bring your roses back, and I will take care that no wolf runs away with you."

"Ah," she answered with a smile, "the wolf did not run off with Red Riding Hood from the wood. It was in her grandmother's cottage he ate her up; there are no talking wolves now." And, clasping her cloak, she stepped out of the doorway with him, as he replied:

"Don't be too sure of that, Miss D'Anyer; there are talking wolves to be met with everywhere, but they go on two legs, not on four. I've heard it was a wolf of this description set his teeth in my father's arm." And the young man's face clouded as he spoke.

"A wolf!" she echoed incredulously. "I heard your father tell Uncle Samuel that he was wounded in a duel. But perhaps you are right, for I think men who fight duels are worse than wolves, and worse than Cain, since they go on purpose to murder one another, and I do not think Cain knew what he was doing. *He* had never *seen death* before he struck his brother."

Arthur Wynne looked down at her in amazement. "That is a new doctrine," he observed gravely, after a pause. "I shall not forget it." And for some time he walked on in silence, keeping the child's hand in his, as an elder brother might.

It did not strike her that she had reflected on his father, and if it occurred to him he made no remark.

Presently she stopped and looked back at the house, with its many angles and gables, its thick black beams intersecting in strange devices the weather-stained rough-cast, its windows of all sizes, from the tiny dormer to the broad mullion, and the one fine oriel over the entrance, from which the road swept downwards in a steep but gradual descent. It had been a noble edifice in its time, but its best days were gone, and there was a disused portion lapsing into utter decay.

"I wonder how old the Forest House is?" soliloquised Muriel, as she scanned it thoughtfully. "It looks older than grandmother's houses in Toad Lane, and they have been built hundreds and hundreds of years!"

"We want my uncle, Sir Madoc Wynne, here to settle that question," replied Arthur; "I am not much of an antiquary; I only know that the place is very ancient. Mr. Kingsley tells me that Eddisbury was a fortified city in Saxon times; his own and his wife's ancestors have held the place as Chief Foresters since the twelfth century."

"That's a long time," said Muriel; "it tires one to count back."

"Ay," responded her companion, "it is almost as far back as Sir Madoc counts his pedigree of the Wynnes."

"Pedigree! Oh! that's what my father talks so much about. And it is so tiresome. I don't think a long pedigree makes people kinder or better. Do you?"

"I have not considered the question; I will tell you when I do," and he laughed lightly, showing a set of firm white teeth, and then he stopped, and pointing westwards bade her "look across to the far horizon. You see those grey mountains standing up like clouds against the sky? Amongst them lies the home of Sir Madoc and his ancestors—and mine," he added as an afterthought.

"And that, shining like water, with the sun upon it, and those church towers?" she asked, as if not much interested in ancestry.

She was told she looked on the river Dee and Chester's old cathedral and churches; but there was a wide and varied landscape spread out before them; nearer Oakmere glittered like a diamond amongst emeralds, and from another point in their ramble came Halton Castle into view with the river which gave its name to the ancient kingdom of Mercia; the river which had scarcely begun to swell with its own importance, for the merchant fleets of the Mersey were then unbuilt, or only represented by a few traders in sugar, cotton, or slaves.

It was all new and glorious to Muriel, her brown eyes expanded to take in the panorama of moss and mere, village and woodland, city or stream or mountain, and then as they strayed through the woods tinged with the gold and brown of autumn, or on the grassy upland, the young man and the child, she filled her hands with flowers, nor questioned how many might have kept possession of the soil since Saxon spades upturned it, though every blossom called an exclamation forth. Tangled amongst bushes and brambles (with the blackberries of which her mouth and fingers soon were stained), she found the white and rosy trumpets of the bindweed, in shady nooks the hart's-tongue fern, and others of the tribe; Scotland's emblem, the spear thistle, held its head erect, and braved the gatherer, but she did not despise the yellow corymbs of the common ragwort, or the golden disk of the dandelion; she found, too, a single raceme of the pure blue milk-weed, and another blossom of the eyebright, lingerers from July; and out in the open, a nodding harebell and a tuft or so of flowering grass were added to her posy, of which she was not a little proud.

It was shown with delight to Mrs. Kingsley, who, thinking little of these wild natives of the forest, smiled at the girl's simplicity, yet supplied a queer-shaped vase of antique ware to hold them. And then they were carried as a precious gift to the invalid, on whose lips came a suspicion of a faint curl as she barely glanced at them; but Owen bade Muriel place her bouquet on a table in the oriel, and there they were left, to be ignominiously cast out on the morrow, when the giver was herself gone, as "disgusting weeds."

But the harebell and the eyebright were not thrown away with the rest. Someone had taken them from the jar; someone who had pleasant associations with the "vanished hand" that had culled them; someone who could symbolise the graceful form, and the bright eyes of the unsophisticated child with these wildlings of the wayside and the wood; someone who had learned a lesson from the child of which manhood might need a reminder.

"Well, have the murdering ruffians been caught yet?" were the first words of Mrs. Bancroft as Mr. Kingsley helped her to dismount the following morning, when she and her son came for Muriel.

"Has the Captain's good horse been recovered?" was the question of Sam.

"Neither," was the answer of the forester. "But there are two men missing from the forest, who were hanging about the

day before ; and the Captain's gone to Chester to set the hounds of justice upon their track."

"Ay," chimed in Mrs. Kingsley, "and we've a notion Maggy Blackburn knows more of the business than an honest woman should."

"What! Nurse Blackburn?" and a curious look crossed the face of Sam Bancroft as the ejaculation escaped him.

"Ay, Nurse Blackburn!" quickly responded the mistress of the Forest House, with a look as curious and meaning into the calculating eyes of the querist, which shifted beneath hers ; "she's none too good, if all were told ; and she knows many a thing more than she tells."

"Hush, hush, wife ; a still tongue makes a wise head, and Maggy Blackburn's not to be blamed for her lads' misdeeds."

"I'm not so sure of that. She should have brought them up better."

"So she should," echoed Sarah, with a proud glance at her own son, as much as to say, "See how he has been trained." "As the twig is bent the tree inclines."

"Is Muriel ready?" interrupted Sam, who had his own reasons for changing the subject.

"Yes, here she comes," cried Mrs. Kingsley, as Muriel at that instant crossed the gallery at the far end of the hall, in her scarlet cloak, with the hood well drawn over her gipsy hat, whether for riding, or to shadow eyes moist from parting with languid and feeble Mrs. Wynne it would be hard to say. "But you won't go without a bite or a sup, and dinner on the table ready for you."

Sam excused himself on account of the horses standing out in the cold, but their host set his mind at ease respecting them, and soon he was busy with the game pie and the home brewed, talking politics with the forester, whilst his mother between the pauses of the knife and fork had a private gossip with Mrs. Kingsley.

Muriel had been called to the board, cloaked though she was, and young Mr. Wynne, who had her flowers in his buttonhole, saw that she was not neglected.

After luncheon there was another run upstairs, for another good-bye of Mrs. Wynne, Mrs. Bancroft following her grandchild, and both wishing the lady a speedy restoration to health, for which she thanked them condescendingly, with the graceful languor of excessive debility.

But no sooner had the door closed behind them, than the sensitive lady cried to patient Owen :—

"My salts, Owen, my salts! How that horrid old woman smelled of cheese! And, Owen, bathe my temples with the Hungary water, her loud coarse voice has distracted me. Thank Heaven! they're gone. That child's exuberance had become quite oppressive. And," after a pause, "my good Owen, when you go downstairs, don't forget to throw out those disgusting weeds."

But when Muriel had taken leave of his lady-mother, Arthur Wynne accompanied her to the front entrance, and with much real friendliness lifted her to her seat on the pillion behind her uncle, whilst Mr. Kingsley, as of old, helped Mrs. Bancroft into her saddle. He had a grateful heart, had the young man, and saw that in his mother's set phrases of farewell for which he would have been glad to make amends.

On the broad doorstep, beneath the oriel, also stood Mrs. Kingsley, in a figured-linen morning gown, whose last words were, "You will let Miss D'Anyer come and spend her holidays here, old friend; my young folk will be home then, and they will show her about. She has seen nothing of Delamere yet, mewed up in a sick room," apparently forgetful that Arthur Wynne was present, still pale, and with a plaistered forehead, but courteous and gentlemanlike as his father, for whose temporary absence he had thought fit to apologise, not omitting thanks in that father's name, and his own.

"I'll think about it," was Mrs. Bancroft's brief response to the invitation, as she stooped to exchange a last business word with Mr. Kingsley, whose hand was on her bridle.

But a smile of truthful earnestness broke over Muriel's homely face and lit up her expressive features while she answered for herself: "Nay, I had a delightful walk through the woods yesterday, and I am sure I have altogether had a very pleasant visit."

"You have done your best to make it so for others, Red Riding Hood," observed Arthur Wynne, as he shook hands with her a second time. "I do not know whether my mother will miss you most or myself, and though we may never meet again, I assure you I shall always remember the cheery little maid with the gentle fingers and compassionate brown eyes under her red riding hood. I shall have a reminder here," and he touched his wounded brow. "Good-bye!"

"The war path and the trade path do not often cross," murmured the young man to himself as the travellers rode off, Muriel nodding back. "There is not much chance of our meeting again. D'Anyer! I wonder how she came by her

aristocratic name. By the way, she said something of her father's pedigree. I'll ask the forester. Anyway, she is a most obliging creature! I wish I had a sister like her, though she is not handsome. There is something in those brown eyes that is better than beauty. I would my father had been here to take leave of them. I am afraid my mother does not sufficiently estimate our obligations to little Red Riding Hood and her friends, and he does."

And now the travellers from Manchester were again on their road, each carrying away a new chain of associations and speculations.

If Sarah Bancroft's equanimity had been disturbed at Eddisbury, it had been restored at Waverham; and as for her son, why, he carried satisfaction under his three-cornered hat, and buttoned up under his dark long-tailed riding coat, if anyone did. He had persuaded his mother that she was arranging that which *he* had arranged and settled quite two years before, and he had done it to his own satisfaction.

"Yes, Mrs. Kingsley, Sam is to marry Lydia Bradley at Christmas; it was that which took me to Waverham this time," Mrs. Bancroft had said to the forester's wife before she came away. "He has loved the lass many a year, but he has stuck to his mother and the business, and would not even ask the girl till I had seen her and said I was willing. Not like that daughter of mine, Muriel's mother, who took the world on her shoulders at sixteen, with never a word to kith or kin. No, I told Sam to see and keep single, and he has done so to please me, and now I mean to take him into the business, and find him a house to live in, and the farmer will fit up the house for them. I've settled it all."

"Ah, well, it's about time Mr. Samuel had a home of his own and a wife in it, and Lydia's a notable body," observed Mrs. Kingsley dryly, asking after a pause, "Shall you come for the wedding?"

"Nay, it's our busy season, they can wed without me."

"So they can," assented Mrs. Kingsley with a secret undercurrent of silent ejaculation. "Bless my soul, how clever people can be taken in! Trust Sam Bancroft to get all *he* wants!"

And having a prospect of getting all he wanted, even to a share of Farmer Bradley's guineas, Samuel chuckled at his own cleverness as he rode along; and cracked sly jokes with the people on the road, for now there were many journeying to the great fair.

Muriel knew nothing of the business which had taken them to Waverham, or of the coming marriage of her bachelor uncle; and as they jogged along her thoughts went back to the Forest House and those she had left there, and lingered amongst the rustling bracken or the many tinted bushes, followed the flight of waterfowl from the meres, or of a hare or rabbit as it scampered out of sight, or travelled ahead to Chester Fair and the unknown school where her journey was to end.

Daylight had not touched the veil of dusk when Boughton Road was left behind, and Foregate-street rose on either side, quaint and curious. Midway, Sam made a feint of stopping; he pointed to an opening on the right, "Here's Queen-street, mother; suppose we leave Muriel now."

Muriel's heart gave a leap;—surely she would not be left among strangers so abruptly!

"Ride on, lad, and no nonsense," said her grandmother, and speedily, to Muriel's relief, the horses were entering the city under the wide arch of the East Gate, and having paid the customary toll, were picking their way amongst a throng of people and horses, and vehicles, and stalls of all kinds and degrees, from that of the itinerant quacksalver to that of the respectable tradesman.

For although there was a ground set apart for the purposes of the fair, it was pretty much abandoned to dealers in horses and cattle, the booths of travelling showmen and mountebanks; and the absolute buying, selling, and barter of merchandise was carried on in the highways and inns of the quaint old city. The church of St. Peter had already hung out the symbolic white glove, and the fair was declared open.

It was not altogether a novel sight to Muriel. Manchester had its fairs, if they differed somewhat in character and importance, and also had its narrow streets of over-hanging timbered houses, picturesque and diverse of gable and tint; it was only when she saw the people walking in the Rows in an arcade above the lower shops, or leaning on the parapets, and amongst them Welsh-women with men's round beavers above their linen caps, that a feeling of strangeness was aroused.

So slow was their progress amongst the crowd that she had ample time for observation, and she was scanning curiously the Yacht Inn at the corner of Nicholas-street, where the ground floor modestly retreated into the shade, and the upper stories advanced successively overhead—quite unconscious that they had halted at the old commercial house, or that the red-faced

landlord was waiting to lift her from her seat—until she had a hint from her uncle.

"Come Muriel, lass, bestir thyself. What art' dreaming about?"

They were shown into a low-ceiled apartment where candles were already lighted, and tables were spread with comestibles for the influx of customers peculiar to fair time. Huge loaves and joints of meat which had lost their fair proportions, remnants of pies, the separate halves of a cheese in japanned biggins, and these flanked with mugs of brown stone-ware with a foam atop, or brightly polished tankards of ale.

Mrs. Bancroft was disposed for something warm after her journey, and soon a well-furnished mahogany tea-board was before her, and as she poured out the fragrant beverage for herself and Muriel, Samuel carved a roasted capon, and dispensed it with the savoury adjunct of broiled ham. But he preferred a pull at a tankard to sips at a tea-cup.

Muriel's appetite, as before, had been jolted out of her.

"You'd best make a good supper, lass," said her uncle, as he laid down his knife and fork, and smoothed his hands along his thighs. "There's no knowing when you'll have another. They'll not feed you with fowl and ham at school," and he chuckled until he choked.

Muriel looked alarmed.

"Be quiet, Sam; don't you scare the lass!" put in his mother sharply. "She will have plenty of good wholesome food. I'll take care of that. Do you think Miss Briscoes would have such a name if they starved their scholars? You might delight in tormenting her!"

Whether or not, he had put to flight what little appetite Muriel had sat down with; and sent her to bed in very unusual depression.

She was, however, fresh for breakfast the next morning; and when that meal was disposed of, was in hopes that her grandmother would take her to the fair. But no, Mrs. Bancroft was too keen a business woman to waste a morning so unprofitably. She did not mean to be unkind, but hers were trading instincts, and Muriel there was an encumbrance.

"I'll see about it before the fair's over. You may look about you as we go along. I've already given a week to the king, it won't pay to throw another day away into the bargain," was all she said as she took Muriel by the hand and stepped on briskly towards Queen-street.

Samuel had been off some time to look after their furs and peltry at the new Hall, and see it unpacked.

CHAPTER VI.

LEFT WITH THE MISSES BRISCOE.

The highly genteel residence of the Misses Briscoe was a solid if somewhat grim brick building with stone dressings, and a flight of steps, the iron handrails of which swept outwards with a curl right and left.

There they were shown into a fireless reception room painted brown, where a pair of globes stood sentry in arched recesses on either side of the hearth, and spindly fireirons in tall rests within a perforated steel fender had an air of never being used, any more than the square footstools on either side, where a worsted cat and dog preserved unbroken peace. High-backed chairs, with contorted limbs and painted velvet covers, were ranged like a regiment against the sombre walls, whereon hung the pictorial embroidery and poonah-painting which was the school's diploma; and on the centre table were books and other nick-nacks presented by grateful pupils or their friends.

After waiting a few moments the two Misses Briscoe entered together, the thin mittened arm of the one sister resting on the thinner mittened arm of the other. Their high-heeled shoes fell on the faded carpet in precise step, and their tall caps and prim long stomachers seemed to bend in unison as they courtesied with gracious, if formal, politeness, and smiled urbanely. They were supposed to confer a favour in accepting the pupil.

Brusque Mrs. Bancroft was not easily overawed. She had no time to spare for ceremony, and after introducing Muriel as the Miss D'Anyer about whom she had written, plunged into business at once.

The two maiden ladies, nowise disconcerted, shook Muriel by the hand, spoke to her with reassuring gentleness, told her she need not tremble, she was certain to be happy under their auspicious guardianship; rang the bell for a "Miss Williams," and desired that young lady when she came, with the most benignant of smiles, to introduce their charming new pupil to her schoolmates.

As a rule Muriel was not demonstrative; but then, notwithstanding the winning aspect of the teacher and the honeyed words of the Misses Briscoe, she flung her arms around the neck of her grandmother, and, as if struck with a quick foreboding, cried piteously, "Oh, grandmother, dear grandmother, do not leave me here; take me back to my mother; take me back to my mother!"

"My dear, you are disturbing your kind relative; pray control your emotions," said Miss Briscoe calmly, releasing the clinging arms with prim decision, and leading the young girl to the door and to Miss Williams, as if the latter had been a sort of warder and she a captive; her grandmother's "Don't fret, Muriel, I'll see you again before I go back," following her with just a gleam of comfort.

There was a slight twitching of Sarah Bancroft's hard mouth, and a suspicious moisture in her eyes as Muriel was led away, but Miss Briscoe's unruffled demeanour recalled the business woman to herself, and she soon found that the Misses Briscoe, although smooth and velvety as peaches, and she as rough as a russet apple, were traders as keen and astute as her own self.

There were so many small matters to be paid for, not mentioned beforehand as extras, so many little items in the way of plate and linen to be provided for the pupil—and left for the school, so much to be settled and arranged respecting course of study and needlework, the use of harpsichord and library, each meaning a fresh dip into the pocket. She, however, was prepared to be liberal, and only stipulated that Muriel should "have a sound education, plenty of good food, and a comfortable home."

Alas for fair promises and testimonials! The Misses Briscoe traded on their power to mould their pupils to pattern, their own frigid gentility the model. They made too much of their Christian principles, and were strict observers of fast-days and forms. But what hearts they might have had in their youth had shrivelled up like their lean bodies, and the human hearts and souls in their charge were all but ignored in their system of training and discipline.

They had a single parlour boarder, and for the first fortnight Miss D'Anyer was permitted to take her meals along with this privileged young lady at the table of the Misses Briscoe, which was set forth with due regard to the proprieties—and economy. But no sooner was the fair over, and the Bancrofts and D'Anyers "gone beyond come again," than she took her place with the rest of the pupils.

True to her promise, Sarah Bancroft had not only obtained the Rev. Thomas Bancroft's promise to watch over Muriel, as she told her for her comfort before she went away; but she had also called to see her grandchild and take her round the city, and although Miss Briscoe and her echo had done their polite best to convince her that "Miss D'Anyer was perfectly happy, and that it would be a thousand pities to unsettle the dear young lady

again," she said she "would rather risk that than break her word."

She tempered her abruptness with an invitation for Miss Briscoe to join them, and then there was no longer any demur.

With a face all smiles, her scarlet cloak around her shoulders, her gipsy hat tied down under her chin, Muriel would have rushed to her grandmother's embrace, but there was a restraining hand to intimate propriety. And there was the chilling presence of Miss Briscoe, with eyes and ears open, whether under Mrs. Bancroft's guidance they traversed the Rows, or the Walls that enclosed the city within a quadrangle of defensive rampart, which peaceful citizens had converted into a pleasant promenade. And whether proud of her native city, or of her historical lore, the precise and stately preceptress descanted learnedly and loftily as they went—if somewhat parrot-like—on its glories and antiquities, ignoring, if not ignorant of the fact that Sarah Bancroft knew pretty well as much of Chester as she did herself, and most likely would have told her so if Muriel had not been there to see and be instructed.

She, poor child, would much rather have cuddled up close to her grandmother, on this last day, and have talked of her mother, and little George, her father, and her sisters, and her cousin Milly Hargreaves, but politeness condemned her to listen, and ere long she found herself interested. For, though she did not care to hear that the citizens owed "to the noble house of Grosvenor the magnificent new arch" of the East Gate (by the steps of which they had mounted to the walls), and could only see in the Cathedral an enormously big church rather out of repair, when they reached the angle of the wall where stood the Phoenix Tower, with the canal flowing tranquilly beneath, and was told that "during the memorable siege of Chester King Charles the First looked out from the top and saw his troops defeated by the Parliamentarians on Rowton Moor," she seemed to feel for the sorrow of the poor king, and would fain have gone herself to the top of the tower and have looked out like him. But her companions scanned the formidable ascent to the doorway, and the promise of further steps inside, with wholesome regard to their own years and breath, so more youthful Muriel scampered up the outer steps alone, to be recalled midway, with a quick "Miss D'Anyer!" in which was compressed the essence of the censure and rebuke she would have in full the next day.

The glories of the expansive view were overcast with shadow as the child descended slowly. Her small army of young hopes were being put to the rout.

She had scarcely forgotten her own disappointment, or that of King Charles, when they reached the old North Gate, where their path lay under a narrow arch in a superincumbent pile of buildings, dark and ancient, the city roadway of course running under the larger arch below. Here Miss Briscoe made a pause to be the more impressive.

"This," said she, "is not only our North Gate, but the City Gaol, and is of most renowned antiquity; indeed, its foundations were laid by the Romans. Of course I was never inside," and she drew herself up virtuously, "but I understand it contains some curious cells, and instruments of torture such as were used in the old days of religious persecution."

"They don't use them now, I hope," put in Muriel earnestly.

"Oh, no, my child," was the complacent answer, "those dark ages are past; no one is tortured nowadays. There was a meddlesome fellow, called John Howard, who had a mania for visiting prisons, came here five years ago, and he mischievously reported that in this city gaol the convicts and prisoners for trial were severely ironed by the neck, hands, waist, and feet, and chained to the floor, and at night to their beds in the horrid dungeon; and he also said the 'allowance of a pennyworth of bread for felons, and a pound for debtors, was inferior in quality to that sold in the city.' And many other things he said, even that 'men and women were not properly separated;' all reflecting on the humanity of the gaoler. But, no doubt, he exaggerated grossly; or if not, does he expect that we are to pamper criminals? If men *will* commit offences, or will *not* pay their debts, they deserve to go to gaol. They have no one to blame but themselves if they are punished."

"I don't think they have a right to put fetters on a man before he is tried," was the commentary of Mrs. Bancroft, who had a habit of forming her own opinions, though not more inclined to deal leniently with offenders than others of her age and time.

But Muriel, who had listened with dilating eyes, broke in breathlessly:—

"I don't think they have a right to put anyone in irons, and chain him to the floor; I think that must be torture."

"Little girls of your age have no right to think," was the severely grave rebuke of Miss Briscoe, and Muriel was silenced.

Then, as if to efface any impression of harshness she might have left on Mrs. Bancroft's mind, this inimitable trainer of youth waved a thin arm and a yellow mitten with a courtly air towards an old building in an angle of the wall, with the gracious

intimation, "And now we approach the 'ancient hallowed Dee,' as the poet Drayton designates our classic river, and here stands the Goblin Tower; the Water Tower, you may observe, lies down below, though the water no longer washes its base as of old."

Her hearers followed the wave of her arm, and looked out over the flowing river and the wide expanse of country on the other side, which Mrs. Bancroft told Muriel was Wales; but she was impatient to get back to her business, and Muriel had not overcome the impression made upon her by the shadows of the dark North Gate, and John Howard's report thereon. Her heart ached for the poor prisoners confined within those hard stone walls, and she saw and heard all else vacantly. The word Wales somehow brought up other associations, and she wondered if the men who had robbed and beaten Captain Wynne's servant would be put in that "horrid dungeon," and chained to the floor if they were caught, and with a child's logic began to hope they would not be caught, if that was how they would be used—though they did certainly deserve punishing.

Her grandmother observed that her mind was astray, and asked, "What art' a dreaming about, Muriel?" and being told, answered, but not harshly, "Don't thee bother thy young brains o'er such things, lass! Rogues like those deserve hanging, and nothing less. How else are honest folk to travel in peace?"

This was another problem for Muriel, who walked dreamily on over the Water Gate and past the green Roodie, with its race course and grand stand, and only roused when the Castle was pointed out.

"What! a real castle, where knights in armour used to live and fight!"

The exclamation was addressed to her grandmother, but Miss Briscoe replied:—

"Yes, Miss D'Anyer, and the ground at the end of Queen-street, where you saw the shows and mountebanks was formerly the 'Justing Field,' where the armed knights were wont to meet for tilt and tourney."

"Oh, like Prince Arthur and Sir Lancelot du Lake and Sir Tristram," and Muriel, who had met with a few old romances, glowed with a new enthusiasm.

"I'm afraid, Miss D'Anyer, yours has not been an improving kind of study. We must amend that," and the enthusiasm was damped.

Indeed, whenever the natural girl broke forth, or addressed herself to her grandmother, or crept to her side lovingly, there

Miss Briscoe interposed to keep the palpitating young heart within bounds, and repress any undue confidences. And when, having left the Bridge Gate far behind, and the Wishing Steps, which promise so much that is impossible, and having made the circuit of the Walls, descended once more into Eastgate-street, Miss Briscoe retained Muriel's hand within her own, "for her safety in the throng of the fair." Nay, even when Mrs. Bancroft led the way to the New Manchester Hall, and generously pressed upon the admiring schoolmistress a mink muff and tippet each for herself and sister, with a view to bespeak favour for her grandchild, her vigilance scarcely relaxed.

It was during the selection of these that Muriel saw her father for a moment, but he was busy with a Welsh customer bartering fustian, tufts, and moleskin for flannel, and had not even a kiss for the child, who sighed and watched him wistfully, but beyond a brief "Good-bye, be a good lass," she had no further word or speech from him.

"Do not disturb your good parent ; you see he is engaged," had been Miss Briscoe's frigid reminder, unheard by the grandmother, or she would have set that matter right.

With half-closed eyes Samuel Bancroft had "taken stock" of the stately old lady as she entered the hall in the wake of his mother, and courtesied to him as formally on introduction as if in a drawing room, and he certainly must have sent a random shot home to her when he saluted the girl in his idea of jocularly with, "Well, Muriel, you're a prisoner now. I hope you like your gaolers."

He had the jocularly taken out of him, however, before the day was two hours older, when someone came to talk to him about prisoners and gaolers, a tall, thin woman, in a grey duffel cloak, whom he called "Maggy," and who came with a request, which took the form of a demand—a demand that had to be complied with before he got rid of her.

It must have been no joking matter to him, for long after she was gone he looked right and left, and rubbed his knees, ejaculating under his breath, "Egad, it's well that antiquated piece of frozen honey and vinegar took our old dame out of sight and hearing, or there'd have been the very devil to pay."

It might be well for Sam, but though her grandmother went back to Queen-street, and she was politely invited to take tea at the same table, Muriel had not one moment's private speech with her.

The wary spinsters might have spared their pains. Muriel was not given to feel oppressed or to complain ; they checked

some loving messages home, but no undue revelations. In fact, she had hardly bent her shoulders to the yoke of discipline when her grandmother went ; but with the closing of the door began her school life in earnest ; school life as it was in the last century, when even in the home the birch was the symbol of rule.

She had her first shock on the night of her entrance, when the bedfellow to whom she had been assigned, a Miss Alice Ford, from Northwich, led her upstairs to the dormitory which she was to share with several others.

It was not only that there were five or six pallet beds in the room, or that pillows and coverings were scant, or that she objected to a bedfellow, or to wash in a basin of water common to others, or that the dim rays of the dip candle, placed on the landing to serve four rooms, had a struggle to reach her corner, or that she was told she must have her clothes folded and be in bed in less than ten minutes ; it was the culmination of all these in a babel and a scramble in which there was no pause for prayer, in which she knelt down amidst confusion, to rise from her knees in the dark, which seemed to overturn all her own mother's reverent teaching, and overwhelm her with dismay.

CHAPTER VII.

MURIEL'S NEW LIFE.

From a confused dream of home, and of nursing her infant brother, whose crying was not to be stilled, Muriel was aroused at six the next morning by the loud clangour of a bell. There was a general leap to the floor, and a repetition of the overnight scramble, not unmixed with contention who should be first to use water or towels, whose turn it was to fasten the backs of bodices, or to make the vacated beds, the prompt willingness of Muriel to give place or to assist others resulting in disaster.

When the bell rang its second summons her frock was not on her shoulders, and of those she had been ready to help not one would stay to fasten it for her. They could cry, " Make haste, you'll be late ! " but only Miss Ford, the daughter of a Northwich yeoman, had the grace to turn back and bestow three minutes on the new pupil.

Those three minutes represented a reprimand, and a fine which went into a money box "for the poor." No excuse was admitted. Miss Ford paid for her act of courtesy (on the score of dilatoriness), and once more Muriel's sensitive heart was shocked. That she, being fresh to the school, and ignorant of its rules, was exonerated, was no satisfaction to her so long as another was punished on her account. She would have refunded the fine.

"Keep your pence," said Miss Ford, who was two years older than herself; "you will need all your pocket money."

And so Muriel thought when Miss Williams warned her not to stand on the hearth or she would be fined, and when the entrance of Miss Betty, after a tour of inspection in the dormitories, and the discovery of stray articles, such as caps and brushes, added sundry pence and halfpence to the growing fund "for the poor."

Whilst Muriel was speculating on the sum in the box, and the amount so collected in a year, Miss Briscoe appeared, and bent her head with a formal "Good morning, ladies," as her sister had done, to be in turn saluted with low and elaborate courtesies from the pupils *en masse*. Miss Williams, the mild and lady-like teacher, then placed a large book on a table near the fire, and at the signal, with wondrously little shuffling, the girls dropped to their knees simultaneously, and Miss Briscoe read, or declaimed, a morning prayer from the volume.

After prayers there was more reprimanding for inattention, carelessness, lack of devotion; and Muriel wondered at her own escape, for her mind would stray homewards, and institute comparisons between the prayers of her mother and of Miss Briscoe.

Breakfast followed, but until she had ceased to be the especial guest of the principals, Muriel knew nothing but hearsay of schoolroom fare.

Her first experience was of the boiled milk and bread set before the young ladies for breakfast thrice a week, which the careful cook had seasoned with bits of eggshell, cheese, suet, &c., shaken in with the crumbs from the bread basket and kitchen table. "Oh! for a cup of the new milk from the Stocks' Farm, and a plate of oatmeal porridge! This mess is uneatable," thought she.

There were plenty of hungry candidates for that which she rejected, and on milk mornings she generally went breakfastless.

Nor did dinner make amends. A good appetite was "vulgar," "over-feeding tended to corpulence," consequently the meat and vegetables were doled out with due regard to the slim gentility

of the young ladies. The consternation when "Oliver Twist asked for more," could not exceed that when Muriel passed her plate innocently for "another potato, if you please."

As at dinner, so was the long tea table set out, with due regard to gentility. Each young lady had her own china cup and silver spoon; but a very wishy-washy apology for tea was poured therein, and one tiny lump of loaf sugar duly dropped in from silver tongs as flavouring, by Miss Williams, who presided. (Brown sugar was not genteel, and white was expensive.) Plates of thick bread, with a microscopic film of butter, were ranged at intervals, and hungry Muriel unsuspectingly helped herself to more than the regulation quantity.

Someone else, better informed, must have done the same, for when Miss Ford and the other monitress, whose duty it was literally to *wait*, sat down to their own chilled repast, the plates were bare.

"Oh, that's nothing new," was the answer of her next neighbour to a question from Muriel; "only two pieces each are sent in. If anyone takes more, someone must go without. There is no more to be had."

Muriel was dismayed. A second time Miss Ford was doing penance for her. She could not stand that. Her sense of justice overcame timidity. She rose, and begged that Miss Williams would order in a fresh supply, explaining that she found she had taken more than her share.

"It is against the rules," said the teacher quietly, but flushed to the roots of her hair, as if she felt her task unpleasant, knowing how insufficient the quantity was for growing girls.

It is certain that Muriel's frank admission and request were not displeasing, or she would not have shut her ears to the indignant "It's a shame!" with which the novice sat down; as certain as that Muriel had a friend in Miss Ford from that hour.

And it was no unusual thing for kindly-disposed Rachael Williams to close both her ears and eyes, when by so doing she could ward off punishment for trivial offences. How else would it have been possible for the day scholars to smuggle in the buns and rolls half-famished Muriel and her companions gave them secret pence to buy.

She had a gentle heart, and had been tenderly nurtured, but her mother had long been dead; her father, a naval officer, had fallen in battle, and she was dependent upon her situation for support. Many were the indignities she herself bore, and bore calmly, waiting patiently for the day in the unknown future when her lover, a Lieutenant Griffiths in her late father's ship,

should come and claim her. Not that she was altogether friendless; she had an aunt in Wales who would have made a home for her, but self-respect inclined her to turn her English education to account, and to put up with minor evils philosophically. She saw much in the fashionable boarding school which she was powerless to remedy, but she had the consolation of softening asperities, and even of turning hardships to a Christian account.

Muriel soon learned to look to her for counsel and comfort. After carrying her silver-clasped bible to St. John's Church a couple of Sundays, it was coolly transferred to Miss Briscoe's hands, and not returned. "It is too costly for a child's use," she was told. The girl felt as if a portion of her heart had been torn away, yet she could not venture to expostulate. To Miss Williams she went in an agony of grief, and laid bare all her mother's wishes and her own promises, as bound up in that volume, and her dread lest it was gone for ever, and the fulfilment of her promise with it.

"My dear Miss D'Anyer," said the teacher kindly, making the best of what she disapproved, "do not be alarmed! When you leave the school your Bible will be restored to you. No doubt Miss Briscoe considered that the parade of so costly a book before your school-fellows was calculated to arouse pride in yourself, envy and other ill-feelings in them. You would not wish to tempt others to evil. Consider it as a temptation out of your way; and remember that your promise to your good mother was made as a means to build up a Christian life. I will find you a plain Bible and Prayer Book, which will serve that purpose quite as well, and I will give you what help I can—a quiet half hour now and then for reading, and explanation when any difficulty arises, if you will regard me as a friend."

Muriel could but remember, as the explanation so kindly put made itself felt, that she had indeed been proud of her exclusive possession, as if it conferred distinction on herself; and she recalled, too, the upturned noses of her school-fellows: their nods, and looks, and sly nudgings as she had taken her place in the file, book in hand; to say nothing of the whispers.

"Isn't Miss set up?" "Silver clasps, indeed!" "Vastly fine!" and other sneers which had reached her in passing, and, being open to conviction, she grew calmer as she listened to Miss Williams's apology, if not altogether reconciled to her loss.

It was soon buzzed about that Miss Briscoe had impounded the coveted volume, and then the same young lips twitted her spitefully with the "pride that had a fall," until Miss Ford interposed between the passive Muriel and their ill-nature.

She soon found that the teacher was as good as her word. Without the slightest show of favouritism, Miss Williams made her feel she *had* a friend beside her there; and truly a friend was needed to make the strict routine endurable. Not that it was worse for Muriel than for others, only that she was perhaps more sensitive and susceptible.

So much time was given to study and needlework, so little—so very little—to recreation; unless the hour devoted every morning to deportment was considered such. Muriel did not think it very lively to bend her knees in courtesys till they ached, or to be screwed up in the stocks to turn out her feet, or to march about the schoolroom with a leather collar propping up her chin, and her arms pinioned by a backboard to improve her figure. She would much rather have walked up and down the kitchen at home with George in her arms, or led a game of romps with her younger sisters, and I am afraid was not over grateful to her grandmother, whose motives had not been confided to *her*.

Yet it must not be forgotten that for healthful exercise—and the parade of the school—there was the weekly promenade round the city walls, with the favour of an occasional detour into the Rows, when those whose pocket money had not already gone in secret to the baker's, or openly to the poor box, might regale at the pastrycook's; and lucky did the girls think themselves if now and then the Misses Briscoe delegated their guardianship to Miss Williams and a monitress.

Muriel would have considered herself fortunate had it been so on that brisk December day when she had been ten weeks in the school. Instead, Miss Briscoe, stiff as any other martinet, marched at the head of the graduated file of girls, while Miss Betty brought up the rear. Miss Williams was a prisoner to the schoolroom, keeping guard over lesser prisoners then in disgrace.

It was a very staid and decorous, but not very animated procession. The keen air sharpened appetites already sharp enough, and the cold pinched fingers and toes already in danger of chilblains. Muriel was well protected from the weather. Other girls had muffs, or cloaks, or gipsy bonnets of straw; but her bonnet was a glossy black beaver, roughened by every breeze, and, worn in conjunction with muff and cloak, the combination brought her into trouble. They had not proceeded far in their routine walk along the Walls when, midway between the Wishing Steps and the Bridge Gate, a young lieutenant of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers was observed lounging idly against the parapet. He had a handsome face under his black cheese-cutter

hat; and as his scarlet coat and white spatterdashes set off a well-formed if slight figure, no wonder if more than one stray glance went towards him.

All at once he gave a recognising start, ejaculated "Red Riding Hood, by all that's wonderful!" and, with a well-pleased smile breaking over his face, darted forward and offered his hand to Muriel, who took it, nothing loth, and answered his "Miss D'Anyer, how glad I am to see you!" with "And so am I, Mr. Arthur. But I did not know you. I hope Mrs. Wynne is better, sir."

"Ah! the hair powder and uniform disguised me, I suppose. Now it was your familiar attire caught my eye. Oh, thank you, my mother is——"

He got no further. Miss Betty from the rear, and Miss Briscoe from the van, had come aghast to the rescue. Consternation sat on every youthful brow but Muriel's, and she wore a look of questioning perplexity. With awful severity Miss Briscoe demanded—

"How dare you presume, sir, to accost one of *my* pupils without sanction? Lying in wait to arrest her progress during our promenade! It is monstrous!"

Lieutenant Wynne bowed, offered a deferential explanation and an apology; but Miss Briscoe was not to be mollified, or "misled," as she phrased it. "Your colonel will hear of this matter, sir," was her final and decisive blow.

Arthur Wynne raised his hat, bowed regretfully, said to Muriel, "I hope, Miss D'Anyer, I have not plunged you into disgrace with my precipitation," and stepped back, leaving the way clear.

But the scandalised spinsters were so much discomposed by the pouncing of this wolf in uniform on one of their flock that nothing but immediate return was possible. It was only in the security of the haven in Queen-street that they could deal with a matter of such moment. The very character of the school was in peril.

As for Muriel, solitary confinement and bread and water diet for the remainder of the week was her portion. Her attempt at explanation only made the matter worse. "Not known him a fortnight! It was disgraceful!"

Solitary confinement in a fireless room in mid-winter with such dietary, would nowadays rouse the indignation of parents, and drive the educational professor into the Bankruptcy Court. Then it was a part of the common system, and it was not for the pupil to rebel or the parent to remonstrate. Alike in our army, our navy, and our schools, discipline was preserved rigorously.

If Muriel, catching at a word thrown out by the young officer, whose commission was little more than a month old, looked for the appearance and intervention of Mrs. Wynne, she was disappointed. That lady never came, although her health was sufficiently re-established for visiting.

"The schoolmistress was quite right, Arthur, and most discreet," she had said to her son. "You certainly took a liberty;" and being reminded of a debt of gratitude still unpaid, replied with nonchalance, "Yes, gratitude is vastly proper, no doubt, but it has its limits and degrees. Mine does not prompt to a cultivation of an acquaintance with a schoolgirl or her trading relatives."

Captain Wynne must have thought somewhat differently, since, before Miss Briscoe could forward her complaint to the colonel at head-quarters, she had a visit from him. He came less to tender an apology for his son than to inquire for Miss D'Anyer, and to smooth away any misconception by the remark that he and his were under considerable obligations to the young lady and her friends, and he desired to thank her in person. Yet so little deference did he pay to Miss Briscoe's dignity, and so little was she disposed to admit precipitancy or mistake on her part, that the captain was constrained to take leave without seeing Muriel, and the message he left was never delivered.

But such a flutter had the officer's arrival created that the news went to Muriel as a "profound secret" along with her bread and water.

For a moment it warmed up the chilly atmosphere of her dormitory; but it passed, and added only one more to the many problems her child-brain attempted to solve during her fasting solitude. At first she had flung herself down on the deeply recessed window seat, and coiling her pinafore round her bare arms, looked down vacantly on backyards, where garments from the wash alone enlivened the scene, and on the playground, where was never any play, wondering and pondering the nature of her offence.

"Oh, what would I not give for my cloak or my fur muff and tippet, from the robing room!" she murmured to herself, as the cold seemed to freeze her blood; "I dare not wrap myself up in one of the quilts, or they would chastise me as they did Miss Sims. It is very cruel! I wonder if either Miss Briscoe or Miss Betty was served so when they went to school! But what is it all for?" And then she walked about the long room to keep herself from freezing utterly; still turning over in her mind the injustice of her punishment, the hardship of her daily life, the

stern discipline of the school, her grandmother's motive for singling her out for such an experience, the pain it would cause her mother to know what she had to endure, the wonder no letters came with news or inquiries, the aching fear lest she was forgotten; and then with the memory of the Sunday evening sermon at the Octagon Chapel came the inner questioning if she was expiating some unremembered sin; and the preacher's category of "sins of omission," coupled with his fiery denunciations, filled her with terror.

Unknown to all, Muriel passed through a crisis in her life in those three solitary days. There had been bitter moments when there was danger that her soft and sensitive heart would harden to stone under the sense of neglect and cruelty. But on the eve of the second day (the day on which Miss Ford, as mistress of her class, had brought up on a daintily covered waiter, the bread and water for her mid-day meal, and with it the secret of Captain Wynne's visit), whilst the Misses Briscoe were sipping their souchong in contentment, Miss Williams, whose heart ached for the innocent offender, carried her own tea up to the bewildered pupil sitting alone in the cold and dark, and with it a downy angola shawl of her own; determined to brave the censure of her employers if it came to their knowledge.

"Here, throw this over your shoulders, my dear, and drink this tea, it may serve to warm you," was all that she said, but it was sufficient. Muriel knew instinctively that the tea was her teacher's own, that she would herself have to go without, and that simple act of self-denying sympathy turned the whole current of the girl's feelings. She burst into tears. The teacher had to slip back hurriedly, but she had time for a few words of healing, and when she left the crisis was past. Muriel sank on her knees and prayed. It was a child's prayer; but it went up to heaven on the wings of faith and submissive humility.

The learning of a psalm had been part of her *punishment*; the Bible left with her for the purpose became an up-springing fountain of *consolation* for all the last day of her penance, and for ever after; and she gathered strength from it as well as comfort and guidance. That which had been intended by the Misses Briscoe as a *penalty* for speaking to a stranger, and which had called up a spirit of rebellion long dormant, was, with God's blessing and the kind teacher's instrumentality, converted into a permanent benefit. Whithersoever Miss Williams went, went also the three Christian Graces, and she had introduced them to her sad little friend.

All the school was agog the following week. Letters were to be written home. It was a sad damper to the uninitiated to find

they had to be draughted on their slates, and to be submitted to Miss Briscoe for revision and interpolation before they could be transferred to paper. Muriel's epistle had undergone wonderful transformation in the process, and she felt some compunction in setting her signature to it when complete.

"How am I to sign this? It is not true," whispered Muriel across the double desk to Miss Ford, who sat opposite.

"What *you* wrote was true. Leave the alterations on Miss Briscoe's conscience," was the cool reply, and after a little more hesitation the letter was signed.

The answer came in a hamper just before Christmas time, when the other pupils were looking forward to home cheer and festivities. Muriel did not see it opened; but Miss Briscoe reported among the contents three letters,—one for herself and two for Muriel, two books, and a large currant cake. This she was at once allowed to cut up and distribute amongst her companions. Then, and not before, Miss Briscoe *read out to her* slowly and deliberately, as if she were picking her way amongst the words and sentences, that which had been penned by her mother and grandmother for the girl's own eye and heart, and to which Muriel listened with clasped hands and eager eyes.

They were just such letters as might be expected to answer her fabulous epistle home. She was congratulated on her health, her happiness, her attachment to her benign teachers, and was told to be thankful for a home so replete with comforts denied in other schools which they could name. Then followed the home news, and this swallowed up the advice with which the letters were concluded.

She learned not only that her Uncle Sam was gone to Waverham to be married to Lydia Bradley, but that her little brother George had been dead for more than six weeks,—the brother she had nursed, who had almost learned to walk by her hand.

After that Miss Briscoe's dry, hard tones fell on deaf ears. Muriel sat on the form with her hands still clasped, but as one crushed and stunned. There were pitying glances directed towards her, but she seemed neither to hear nor see. At length Miss Williams took her by the hand, and led her to her own room, where the sluices of grief might open and relieve the bursting child-heart.

She did more; under the conviction that it would be cruel to leave the young thing with those frigid spinsters in that great house, alone with her new sorrow, she obtained permission (granted readily enough on the calculation that her board would be saved) to bear Muriel away with her to Wrexham, where she

always spent her own holidays, at a large farm about a mile beyond the town, with her good-natured and hospitable Aunt Parry.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. HOPLY'S POSTSCRIPT.

ONLY three weeks' holiday ! Yet what a boon and a refreshment it was, alike to worn-out teacher and pupil. To Muriel it was nothing less than a providential change for which body and soul were the better.

Fancy what she would have endured shut up for those three weeks with the prim and unbending spinsters in their formal back sitting room, without recreation or books calculated to dissipate her new sorrow—the library, of which “the use” formed an item in Miss Briscoe's bill, was scant and heavy—or waking the echoes in the solitary dreariness of the uncarpeted schoolroom and dormitories ; to pass and repass servants to whom she might not speak ; to shiver in view of a fire she might not approach ; and to sit in silence at a precise table where her portion of food was all too meagre.

And then contrast the untrammelled freedom of the farmhouse life, which she had been so fearlessly invited to share, and where a hospitable welcome met them in advance with the farmer's cart at Wrexham, to be repeated in every act and word of her kind hostess. True, everyone there save Mrs. Parry had a Welsh tongue, and her English was none too fluent ; but Miss Williams was a ready interpreter, and in her absence a smiling pantomime did duty for speech ; and it was good fun for Muriel to pick up words and phrases in the Cymric vernacular. Then there was the abundant and nutritious fare—milk, eggs, poultry, apples, honey, without stint, with the very sweetest of brown bread and butter.

Muriel had learned to milk at the Stocks' Farm. It was a renewed pleasure to pat the sleek sides of the small Welsh cows, and try her hand afresh at milking time. She could help to feed the poultry, watch with interest the processes of churning, butter and cheese making, and could share in the Christmas merry-making, where the strange costume and speech were part of her

entertainment; and if she could not understand the Sunday services at Wrexham's picturesque church, she could comprehend her kind friend's translation and comments during the drive back to the farm.

On one of these occasions the spring cart, driven by Mrs. Parry's son, had to be drawn aside to make way for a passing carriage drawn by two small native ponies; and in which reclined a lady muffled up in furs, and accompanied by a portly gentleman.

In the former Muriel recognised Mrs. Wynne, and with a sudden exclamation clasped her hands elated; but the lady made no sign of recognition, and her companion was a stranger. The girl's countenance fell.

"Do you know that lady?" inquired Miss Williams.

"Yes, she is Mrs. Wynne, Captain Wynne's wife, mother of the young officer—you remember."

Yes; Miss Williams remembered; she had heard how Muriel chanced to know the young lieutenant; and she had an opinion that the lady might have distinguished Muriel in the cart, had she been so minded, but she only added, after a few words in Welsh with Mrs. Parry, "Mrs. Wynne is staying with the captain's relatives at the Plas, we may meet her again."

Meeting thus with Mrs. Wynne, sent Muriel's thoughts off at a tangent to the forest, to wonder if the captain's servant was better, and if the robbers had been put in prison; and if they were the men Mrs. Kingsley fancied; and who that Maggy Blackburn was, for she had kept her ears open though her lips were closed. Then having landed at Waverham with Maggy Blackburn, the marvel of her Uncle Samuel's marriage filled her mind with speculations what her new aunt would be like, and when she would see her, and where they were going to live; and then home her thoughts flew to her mother, mourning for the loss of little George, and she had not a very bright face when the cart stopped at the farm gate.

They did not meet with Mrs. Wynne again, although they wrapped themselves up and rambled over the mountains, making the most of the fine crisp weather, day after day. There is no question Muriel was disappointed, but she did not let disappointment mar her enjoyment. Indeed, she gathered a fund of more than health in those excursions. For to Rachael Williams—

Not a tree,

A plant, a leaf, a blossom, but contained
A folio volume. She could read, and read,
And read again, and still find something new,—
Something to please and something to instruct,—
E'en in the noisome weed.

And though winter had stripped most of the leaves from the book of Nature, she could find—

Sermons in stones, books in the running brooks,
And good in everything.

And so she fed Muriel's receptive mind with the purest thought, and led the girl to look herself for good in everything, even though the mountains wore no summer robes, and the air was keen and cold.

It was well; for Muriel had gone to the Misses Briscoe's school under a delusion, only to experience a rough awakening. She went back *now*, re-invigorated and strengthened, to face evils of which she knew the worst, and determined, with the help of her Heavenly Father, to make the best of that which she could not remedy, and which might not be wholly evil.

It was well she went back to the chilly rooms, scant fare, wearisome exercises, and difficult tasks (not so much in books as needlework) in so cheerful a spirit; it served to reconcile her somewhat to the severe discipline, and brighten the monotonous hardship of daily routine, not only for herself, but for those with whom she came in contact; as Rachael Williams had brightened it for her.

Young misses of the present generation have no conception what those hardships were at the period when the birch for personal castigation was considered an indispensable adjunct of even a fashionable seminary; when the set visits of music and dancing masters alone broke the monotony; and a letter or hamper from home put the whole school in a flutter, even though the contents were doled out, as it were, through a sieve.

It was quite an excitement when Miss Briscoe announced, with some stateliness, the arrival of "an eminent artist to paint Miss Ford's portrait." This was to be painted on white silk for the after embroidery by the favoured young lady of draperies and accessories in coloured silks; such portrait-taking being a sure indication of a coming removal from the establishment, and of friends willing to pay well for the distinction. Yet Muriel blurred a bright carnation in her own embroidery with a tear when she heard of the parting in store, for she had learned to love Alice Ford.

Two years—two years more of study and privation—and then Miss D'Anyer herself was invited "to have the honour of sitting to the celebrated artist;" but prior to that, her grandmother (who came duly for the great fairs, and brought just a few scraps of home news for the girl's hungry heart, and always a present for the Misses Briscoe) had carried off in triumph an embroidered

posy with impossible stems adorned and tied with a sprawling blue bow, all on a circular disc of white satin, likewise a filigree basket and tea-caddy, a set of fine linen shirts, and a muslin apron of marvellously delicate workmanship, to be exhibited to the D'Anyers as a proof of Muriel's proficiency, and her own wisdom in bearing her off to Miss Briscoe's renowned school.

She had no suspicion how many fines had been paid, how many tears shed by aching eyes over the "sixteen different open-work stitches" in the embroidered apron which Miss Briscoe displayed with so much pride as "a credit to the school," or how often the rosebuds and forget-me-nots had bloomed and faded from the satin before completion. And so far had Muriel accepted the irremediable, that, proud of her work and the commendations she received, she was too full of questions about those at home, during the brief visits of her Grandmother Bancroft or her father at fair time, to think of complaining, had the opportunity been allowed.

Indeed, so rigidly was the dogma enforced, "Obey those in authority over you," that the complaint of a child or anyone *not* in authority, would have been disregarded, if indeed it did not suggest insubordination, and a more rigorous rule. And so long as Muriel was no worse off than the rest, she would have felt ashamed to talk of hardship, or accuse either Miss Briscoe or Miss Betty of inhumanity.

Consequently, when the Rev. Thomas Bancroft, mindful of his promise, called to ascertain how the young lady was progressing, he carried away only favourable impressions, setting down to youthful diffidence the hesitation of Muriel to answer, in the presence of Miss Briscoe, his questions, whether she was happy and comfortable. Muriel gained nothing by his brief visits, but the suave Miss Briscoe did. The good report of the learned Headmaster of the Grammar School was not to be despised, and they gained that by Muriel's uncomplaining silence.

Nay, she made no complaints during the midsummer holidays spent at Forest House, and if she looked thin, it was put down to over-growth and over-study.

She was too curious to ascertain what became of Captain Wynne's servant, and if the robbers had been caught, to say much about herself, though it did transpire that she had been punished because Arthur Wynne spoke to her, and that she had not been allowed to see the captain when he called.

"Ah, I dare say it was against the rules," said Mrs. Kingsley, polishing and dusting an oaken buffet or sideboard on which silver drinking vessels disputed precedence with china punch-

bowls. One of the former she took up and handed to Muriel ; " See what the captain sent to my good man, and read what is on it, ' A token of a stranger's gratitude for genuine kindness and hearty hospitality.' It's a fine cup ; Kingsley's rare and proud of it, I can tell you. And look here, I'm just as proud of these." And she threw open a panel door of the buffet to display a china tea-service over which a modern æsthete might rave.

" I suppose Mrs. Wynne sent you that," suggested Muriel, when she had sufficiently admired both.

" Not she ! And if she had I should have sent it back. She gave herself too many fine airs to suit me. If the rest of the world wasn't born to wait upon her, she thought so. No, it came from the young man ; the best of the lot ; the only sociable one of the three. I dare say he had some of the family pride, but he didn't show it here. Kingsley and he got on famously together ; and he looked well after that man Norris."

" I'm glad of that," said Muriel, " but you did not tell me——"

" Oh, I forgot. Aye, the thieves were caught as sure as they ever will be, but there were three or four folk, an ostler and a barmaid, and one or two others that swore an alibi, and so they got off, more's the pity. For, if there be two bigger rogues in all Cheshire than those Blackburns, I never saw an honest man. And that old mother of theirs is quite as bad. I wonder how Lydia and your uncle——" Mrs. Kingsley stopped short suddenly, as if the vigorous rubbing of old oak demanded all her breath and attention.

Muriel looked up—wondered—but she had asked what was an alibi, and Mrs. Kingsley launched into an explanation that it was a proof an accused person was somewhere else when a crime was committed ; and then into compassion for Norris, who would be lame for the rest of his life, his hip having been " put out ;" and Muriel went back to school without hearing what Mrs. Kingsley had to say about uncle Sam and her new aunt ; the aunt she had not seen.

Back to school, fresher and brighter ; to grow pale and thin again as the months went on ; and there was again a dreary winter holiday before her when all her schoolfellows were gone. But her good friend Miss Williams again came compassionately to the rescue, and Muriel was quite content to leave the good things in her Christmas hamper for the Misses Briscoe, so long as she was carried off to spend another delightful vacation at Wrexham. The last ; for soon after, to Muriel's great grief, she was called upon to part from her beloved teacher ; that governess on whom the Misses Briscoe looked loftily down, yet to

whom she, and not she alone, could point in all her after life as her exemplar ; who had taught her that patient endurance might be sublime, and that *self* was a very small item in the sum of duty.

The naval officer had come ashore on leave and promotion. There was such a lovers' meeting in the spinsters' reception room as ought to have brightened it up for ever. Then followed a happy wedding at St. John's, and a feast to all the boarders; over which the Misses Briscoe graciously presided in their best array, because they got all the credit and had none of the cost ; when there was a general presentation of girlish tributes of esteem and affection.

And when at last the gallant Captain Griffiths carried off his bride in a post-chaise, so many tears were shed for the loss of their gentle teacher, that Miss Briscoe nodded her head significantly, and said in confidence to her sister, "It was time she went ;" to which the echo responded, "So it was."

Thoughtful for others to the last, the newly-made wife contrived to make that a red-letter day for Muriel as well as for herself, by the restoration of Deborah Massey's Bible, surrendered by Miss Briscoe at her urgent entreaty ; and the few impressive words of farewell counsel which accompanied it were not likely to be soon forgotten.

Her departure was a loss to the whole school. Her successor was of another order. She strained discipline to hide her own incompetence, and made the girls' lives intolerable with fines and punishments, intensifying instead of softening the harsh rule of the principals. But if the good teacher was lost, her influence was not. In emulation of her example, it became Muriel's aim to screen or shield younger or more delicate girls from undeserved penalties, to lend her aid in difficult tasks, whether of book or work, and between her cares for others and the embroidery which was supposed to herald release, time passed less drearily.

She was now a tall, thin, dark-haired, brown-eyed maiden close upon fifteen, taking her place as monitress in due rotation ; and, besides coming in for frequent short commons in consequence, had many opportunities for self-denial. Then she had a child of eight in her charge in school and dormitory ; and that which might have been a source of irritation to others proved a very safety valve for her pent-up affections. And surely never was one school girl so cared for by another as was Polly Dutton.

Not only when lessons from Johnson's School Dictionary or Murray's Grammar had to be driven into a dull brain, but night after night in the severe depth of winter did Muriel sit up in bed,

chafing the child's benumbed feet in the dark, to allay incipient chilblains, while her own were in a far worse plight. And who but she had the bravery to appeal to Miss Briscoe's humanity against the weekly promenade on the walls, and the double walk to morning service at St. John's and evening service at the Octagon Chapel on the Sunday, when the snow lay deep upon the ground, and every girl in the school had sore heels to be excoriated by the friction of shoes and pattens.

And what though Miss Briscoe stood aghast at her audacity, and, lifting her mittened hands, declared—

"It would bring ruin on the school! So long as Mr. Twemlow's young gentlemen can walk about for air and exercise, or to attend divine service, our young ladies *must*. A single exception might be made; but as a *body*—*impossible*!"

What mattered it, so long as Muriel obtained immunity for the little one in her charge and two others, and induced Miss Betty to prepare a whey of alum and milk to bathe affected feet! She was herself reprimanded; but she "had done *some* good," and was therewith content.

The snow lay on the ground for weeks. Miss Briscoe was inflexible. Through it the limping girls must plod so long as Mr. Twemlow's pupils went their wonted way. (They might, or might not, be in like condition). Even Miss Betty ventured to expostulate (*she had* a slightly tender spot under the hard crust); but she was put down with "Betty, I am surprised! We cannot afford to indulge in foolish sentiment. We must maintain appearances at any cost. The reputation of our school depends upon it. What would be thought if even half the girls were left at home? It would be ruin—utter ruin!"

As if she had invoked it, ruin came after the snow was gone, and of the general chilblains only the scars remained.

An epidemic broke out in the school, which was *not* to be concealed. Cestrian parents removed their children in alarm, and spread the rumour to others further afield. True to her creed, Miss Briscoe delayed communicating with friends until Dr. Wilmslow urged the necessity.

"But we shall lose all our pupils, sir," argued Miss Briscoe, in dismay.

"Ye—es, madam, so I am a—afraid; but—a—I see no alternative. The healthy—a—a—must be removed—a—a—for their own safety." (The puffy little physician seemed to draw inspiration from the gold-headed cane which he tapped against his chin, as the pungent essence within its perforated golden knob rose to titillate his learned nostrils, and disinfect the

air). "Relatives will—I doubt not—a—appreciate your—a—thoughtful attention, and—a—a—self-sacrifice. And—a—I fear, madam—you would—a—be *certain* to lose them—a—otherwise."

"You do not think there is any real danger of the others, doctor, do you?" and the lace frill of her tall cap trembled as she spoke.

The doctor had a pecuniary interest in the Misses Briscoes' pupils, but he had also his professional reputation at stake.

"Well—um—a—not if they—a—have a careful—a—attention, such—a—as Miss D'Anyer gives to Miss—a—Dutton, and—a—you have space to separate the—a—cases."

"Separate! Why, sir, we have given up one dormitory to the invalids already! The house is like a hospital!"

"Without hospital conveniences," thought the doctor, as he closed his lips with the gold knob of his cane, and bowed himself out.

And so thought Mrs. Bancroft when she came upon the scene about a week later.

Manchester had only just set about lighting, watching, and cleansing the town by Act of Parliament; it had not added a postman to its list of officials in the spring of 1793. The whole postal staff of the rich and thriving manufacturing centre consisted of Miss Willet, the postmistress, and *two clerks*! Had not Sarah Bancroft, as a business woman, sent a trusty messenger to the small post office in St. Ann's Square twice or thrice a week, as did other merchants and traders, Miss Briscoe's tardy communication might have waited with its face to the window pane until seen and demanded.

It was a dreary, drizzling February day. With a hood over her head to protect her cap, Mrs. Bancroft slipped her feet into pattens and crossed the wet yard to a long, low, timber, louver-boarded shed, where her son stood to superintend the nailing of raw or damp skins, fur downwards, on dry boards, and the dusting or rubbing of powdered quicklime on others already stretched, such being at *that* time the cleansing and purifying process.

She had two open letters in her hand. "Eh, Sam! here's a pretty coil. Read that," and she put Miss Briscoe's formal letter into his hand, whilst her quick eye went over the rows of skins set aside to dry, and those in preparation, and her equally quick tongue called out to a workman: "Lightly, lad, wi' th' lime! Dost mean to eat through the skin to th' fur? Thah lays it on th' chinchilli as thick as if 'twere bearskin."

"Well," said Sam, "and what's the coil? What if Muriel

be ill ? Doesn't Miss Briscoe say there's no occasion for alarm ; she will have every care and attention ? ”

“ Ay, ay, lad ; but read what Mrs. Hopley says, and then spell, and put together.”

Mrs. Hopley was a mantua maker in Watergate-street, Chester, patronised by the beautiful Lady Grosvenor, to whom she had been for many years own maid or housekeeper, until, late in life, she married the butler, and speedily discovered that if she would have a garment to wear herself, she must begin to make garments for other people.

The buying of undressed skins (rabbits were classed and killed as vermin) had taken Mrs. Bancroft to Eaton Hall year by year ; she had thus become acquainted with both, and now she supplied Mrs. Hopley with prepared furs for her aristocratic customers.

Mrs. Hopley's epistle would have been a mere order for court ermine for “ my lady,” with sable and mink in sets and for trimming for other customers, given with business-like precision, save for an afterthought which found expression in a postscript.

“ I think you have a grandchild at Miss Briscoe's. Of course you will send to remove her without delay ; and if your messenger brought the furs it would save carriage. What a direful calamity for the Briscoes ! ”

It was a characteristic addendum.

“ Well,” said Sam, scratching his chin, “ *that* means something. It's decidedly queer ! ”

“ It means a journey to Chester for me, lad. I shall be off by the morning packet boat, to catch the coach at Preston Brook ; so get the furs sorted out and packed first thing. Whatever's the matter, I'll see into it. And see you don't go to D'Anyers, and frighten Ellen. And give that wife of yours a caution ; though Lydia looks as if she could hold her tongue. I'll be back before the week's out.”

“ Ay, trust Lydia to keep a secret with any woman alive ; ” and a curious look came into Sam's half-shut eyes.

“ I want no secret kept ; I only recommend caution for Ellen's sake. Secrecy, sin, and sorrow begin with the same letter ; ay, and selfishness too. Keep clear of secrets, my lad ! ”

She had turned so abruptly that the peculiar expression of doubt and misgiving which suddenly settled on the face of that thirty-three years' “ lad ” was unseen. And if the clank of her pattens echoed any misgivings in Sarah Bancroft's own breast, they were not of her son Sam, or of her own unerring judgment, but of the Misses Briscoe, so bepraised in her grandchild's

letters home. Mrs. Hopley's postscript pointed to something more than did Miss Briscoe's guarded epistle. She was "bound to see into it."

And she did, but was *not* back before the week was out.

CHAPTER . IX.

A PROPOSAL.

WHEN ushered into the prim reception room, so rich in specimens of needlework and caligraphy, and flattering testimonials, Mrs. Bancroft found herself in the midst of an excited group of strangers, to whom a surgeon named Prestbury, engaged by an anxious father, was enunciating his very decided opinion that the outbreak of disease in the school was mainly due to insufficient dietary, warmth, and water supply; and, in short, much that is now summed up as defective sanitation.

"Infamous! infamous!" ran round the room in a chorus. Guardians and relatives rose in a body from their high-backed embroidered chairs, and turned with one accord and all degrees of exasperation towards the two spinsters, who stood, with primly-folded arms and compressed lips, to confront accusations and reproaches with dignified silence.

Denial was impossible—the condition of the suffering girls, the scant bedding, the crowded dormitories, needed little by way of evidence from young lips to confirm the surgeon's sorrowful testimony. Yet it was from young lips Mrs. Bancroft learned that Muriel had caught the infection whilst watching and tending Polly Dutton and others in the dormitory.

"She was so kind, and I am so sorry," said her little informant, pitifully, adding: "And she read to us out of her beautiful Bible, and the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and 'Evenings at Home,' and never seemed tired. No one reads to us now."

But Muriel made no complaint. She only said:

"It was very well I was not taken ill at first, or Polly would have had no one to nurse her, and might not have got better so soon."

Getting better for any of them was not an easy matter *there*, yet not an hotel in the town would open its doors to a patient from the infected school.

It was the break up of the important establishment. By ones and twos the pupils were removed as speedily as safety permitted. Only the few who had escaped, and whose distant friends were uninformed, remained until the vacation, and of these not all returned.

It was in vain, by tardy attention to the sick, that the Misses Briscoe strove to rehabilitate themselves in public esteem, and maintain their position. Strict discipline was allowable, but not starvation. The prestige of the school was gone; and after a struggle against fate, in a year or two they announced their "intention to retire."

Seeing no chance of her removal with the disorder at its height, energetic Mrs. Bancroft coolly took possession of Muriel's dormitory, as if it had been a hospital ward, and she the appointed nurse; a hint taken by two other pupils' feminine friends, whether to the chagrin or the satisfaction of the sisters there is no knowing. As for Mrs. Bancroft, she engaged her own doctor, sent in supplies, and took care that medicines and diet were duly administered.

She set aside Miss Briscoe and Miss Betty at the outset.

"Look you," said she, "don't you go near my granchild with long faces and pitiful words as if you cared for her. All you care for is *money*. The little creatures committed to your charge have been no more to you than so many oranges, out of which you could squeeze the golden juice. And you've squeezed them a trifle too close at last. Here I am, and here I shall remain until there is a change one way or another. And if Mr. Prestbury's orders are not carried out, and aught happens to my dear child, if there's justice to be had in the Pentice Court, you shall suffer for it. I'll see to that."

And there, sure enough, did the hard-featured woman of business, whose soul was supposed to be wrapped up in business, remain, watching night and day by Muriel's bed with unwavering affection; her bustling energy subdued to quiet, or expended on obstructives in the regions of the kitchen, to whom she soon laid down a law of her own.

Up and down stairs she went with the activity of a younger woman; indeed, if truth were told, sitting still to watch the thin face was like a penance to her.

At such times would her thoughts fly off to the furriery, wondering how Sam would manage without her; if orders were executed properly; if certain furs had been dressed satisfactorily; if wages and bills had been paid. Then her mind would revert to Ellen D'Anyer and her probable anxiety; and occasionally a

still small voice would whisper that she had better have left the girl with her mother. But the whisper made her uneasy, and she resolutely closed her ears.

Then she blamed the Rev. Thomas Bancroft for keeping her in the dark; little thinking how he had been blinded on the one or two occasions he had made for seeing the girl, or how much the good man was occupied with his own concerns, his duties as clergyman, schoolmaster, author, and as the father of a family.

She had trusted so much to his supervision when she brought Muriel to the Misses Briscoe; and now she blamed herself for trusting to anyone *but* herself.

There was only one thing she liked less than a silent watch; and that began when Muriel first showed signs of amendment, and expressed a desire that she would read the Bible *aloud* to her. She could not refuse; but surely never had Deborah Massey's Bible been opened less willingly.

Muriel's full eyes kindled at her favourite passages, unwitting that many a one was a searching probe to her grandmother's self-reliant soul.

Before Muriel left her bed the task required less effort; and by the time she was able to walk downstairs, Sarah Bancroft had resolved to renew her acquaintance with the large family Bible, mounted on the old oak bureau at home.

Then followed a demand for Miss D'Anyer's bill, and a business-like docking of exorbitant charges, never before disputed, ere Sarah Bancroft opened her canvas money bag and laid her guineas down.

Schoolbooks and other belongings had already been gathered together, not forgetting the unfinished portrait, to be completed at home. An ostler came from the Plume of Feathers in Bridge-street for the "young lady's luggage." There was a tearful farewell to the remaining fragments of the broken-up school, poor motherless Polly Dutton sobbing on Muriel's neck. There was a more ceremonious and less affectionate leave-taking in the worsted-work apartment (where Mrs. Bancroft had spoken her mind pretty freely), an exchange of elaborate courtesies, and Muriel, who longed to say she was sorry for their misfortune, went down the outer steps for the last time; her freedom anticipated by fully three months.

She was not judged fit for a tedious journey; but her grandmother (who never lost sight of business, and so turned her involuntary presence in Chester to account) invited Mrs. Hopley's company, hired a boat at the Bridge Wharf, and the following day treated Muriel to a breezy row up the river to

Eaton Park, the home of the Grosvenors. And it was a treat to Muriel, who had only seen the silvery Dee from the walls, and previously nothing wider than the fresh water Irwell and Irk, and had never put foot in a boat before.

As they walked, after landing, along the avenue of bare but stately trees, just swelling into bud, to the imposing and solid, if heavy, brick mansion Sir John Vanbrugh had designed (since superseded by a *palace*), and Muriel's brown eyes, ranging over the park—where indications that spring was on the alert made themselves felt, and seen, and heard—were filled with silent delight, she was startled out of her dreamy rapture by the abrupt question of her grandmother,—

“Didst ever hear or see anything more of that captain and his wife who had so narrow an escape in Delamere Forest?”

Muriel flushed with shame as she answered, not shame for herself, but that which she had to tell of others.

“Well, grandmother, Mr. Arthur was on the Walls one day when the school went for the weekly airing; I scarcely knew him, for he had on a fine uniform, and looked so handsome, but he knew me, and came to shake hands with me, and then—and then, Miss Briscoes were angry, said he was ‘rude’ and ‘impertinent,’ threatened to write to somebody about him, and perhaps they did, for we never met him again—and I was reprimanded, and sent to the dormitory.”

“For what?” was the mutual interrogation of her companions.

“Why, it seems I had broken the rules in speaking to him.”

“Broken the fiddlesticks!” exclaimed Mrs. Bancroft indignantly. “I wish I’d known! Then I suppose that was the last of them.”

“Well, I was told, as a great secret, by one of the monitors, that Captain Wynne called the next day, and asked for me, but Miss Briscoe sent no message to me, and he never came again.”

“Eh? And didn’t the lady you had waited upon hand and foot come herself?”

“I don’t know, I was never told. But I’ve *seen* her. I saw her the first time I was in Wrexham—the Christmas little Georgey died.”

“Ah,” interrupted her grandmother, “and when your Uncle Sam was married. Well?”

Muriel went on, “We were on a narrow road in Mrs. Parry’s cart, and she met us in a carriage—but she didn’t see me,” and a sigh pointed the sentence.

“Wouldn’t, more like. I’ve no notion of fine folk, who take your services as if they’d a right to them, and are too proud to

know you afterwards ; but the lass has as good blood in her veins as they have, I know. Catch me putting myself out of the way for such people again ! I hate ingratitude."

"Nay, grandmother," pleaded Muriel, "I don't think Mrs. Wynne ungrateful ; you know she gave me that beautiful locket ! and I'm certain Mr. Arthur was glad to see me."

"Well, well, child, have your own way !" was Mrs. Bancroft's conclusion of the argument. "That lass has more charity than I have," she whispered, aside to Mrs. Hopley ; adding aloud, "But here we are, and now, Muriel, you can have a rest."

There was rest and a luncheon in the housekeeper's room, along with the house steward and lady's maid, over which the elders chatted pleasantly ; then Muriel, being still weak, was laid on a roomy sofa, whilst Mrs. Hopley had an interview with Lady Grosvenor, and Mrs. Bancroft with the head gamekeeper. Muriel was fatigued and drowsy ; she was at length awakened from slumber by the housekeeper's invitation to show her the picture gallery and other state apartments.

It was all new and wonderful to Muriel ; and when at length they returned to Chester, she had forgotten all about the Wynnes and her grandmother's suggestion of ingratitude, which had given her some unpleasant sensations.

She was left the next morning to explore the city in which she had lived so long, and of which she had seen so little, whilst her grandmother made business calls on customers in the Rows.

The afternoon was given to a formal tea drinking at Mrs. Hopley's, where Muriel was treated with especial attention, not only as a convalescent, but as Mrs. Bancroft's grandchild.

Indeed, Mrs. Hopley—a little woman in a plain black stuff dress, of no fashion but her own—seemed to lay herself out to attract and entertain her younger guest ; now a tall, thin girl of graceful bearing, and not uncomely face. Time had done wonders in the three years and a half she had spent in Chester, and if her flowing locks had been sacrificed in her recent illness, the old marks on her skin were rapidly disappearing.

There were hot wheat-cakes, and other Cheshire delicacies on the table, of which she was invited to partake freely. After tea she was taken to the show-room, where Lady Grosvenor's court dress, suspended on an upright pole with crossway pegs for arms, and inflated by a hoop, was displayed, amongst others, most attractively.

"How do you like them, my dear ?" questioned Mrs. Hopley graciously, after explaining to Muriel that hoops were worn at court, though out of fashion in private life, court dress being

appointed at the beginning of a reign, to be retained to the end ; and the little plain woman in black gave a touch to a fold here, and a turn to drapery there, so as to catch the light and produce the best effect.

"Oh! very much;—at least, all but that purple velvet, I don't care for the way it is trimmed," answered truth-telling Muriel, whose instinctive taste was offended.

Mrs. Hopley lifted her eyebrows, "How would you have trimmed it?" she said with encouraging suavity.

"Oh, I am not a mantua maker," Muriel replied modestly, "but I think I should have liked it better this way," and she proceeded to a practical demonstration with some loose paper, and pins from her own pocket pincushion.

"My dear," cried Mrs. Hopley, "your admirable suggestion shall be carried out on another robe. I wish I had a young lady in my workroom with so much taste and discernment. Talent of that kind is instinctive." A few more questions were asked to draw Muriel out, and Mrs. Hopley—who had made her acquaintance before, when growth had necessitated fresh garments—exclaimed, "You might have been a milliner! What say you, Mrs. Bancroft, to leave her with me as an apprentice. It's a thousand pities so much natural taste should be wasted; and if, as you tell me, there is a large family of girls, she would find a knowledge of dressmaking extremely useful—supposing she did not work for strangers," she added, observing the compression of the furrier's closed lips.

"She is going home with me to-morrow, Mrs. Hopley," was Sarah Bancroft's answer, somewhat doggedly given.

Mrs. Hopley returned to the charge. She had seen Muriel's embroidery and tambour work,* and had long desired to get one of Miss Briscoe's needlework pupils into her workroom, to replace one named Phœbe Horne, who had been out of her time quite two years, and was missed.

"Yes, yes, of course; I don't mean now—but after a while" (she had said "leave her with me.") "You have known me long enough to trust her in my care; you know I have children of my own."

"Ay, ay, I know," was all the response.

Mrs. Hopley turned to Muriel, "Would you like to be able to

* So called from being worked on muslin or other material stretched on a frame as tightly as a drum. The tambour needle resembled somewhat the modern crochet hook. It was secured into the handle by a small screw, and could be removed or exchanged for another needle at will; and it had a rather sharp point.

make and trim such a robe as this," and she laid her finger lightly on a rich amber and black brocade.

"Oh, yes, if——"

Her "if" was cut short. "You hear, my friend?" and then after a pause—

"It is worth considering. Neither man nor woman should be without a trade in these uncertain times. Riches take wing, and a living at the finger ends does not. And I have not found mantua making at all derogatory. I maintain a good position," and the little woman looked as if she knew her own importance.

"Well, well," said the furrier impatiently, "I'll see about it," as if desirous to turn the conversation.

"That's right, do! I'll make the premium easy," persisted Mrs. Hopley as a clencher, "and we might shorten the seven years to five."

But no more was said, and the girl hoped no more would be said; she was not inclined to take kindly to the proposal, but she stood too much in awe of her grandmother to venture an opinion of her own unasked.

To untraveller Muriel the homeward journey was something too exquisite for speech. The early March winds were keen, but Mrs. Bancroft declared, "I'd as lief be shut up in a hayloft or a snuffbox as be stifled inside a coach. Give me the breeze that blows the cobwebs off a body!" So they were outside passengers, their places having been taken and booked overnight; and as they were well wrapped up in warm woollen and fur, neither she nor the convalescent Muriel could take much harm.

She was not a talkative woman; and no sooner were the wheels in motion than her thoughts travelled with them to the warehouse and sheds left for more than three weeks to the sole care of Sam.

Muriel's joyous anticipations outstripped the horses; but the face of nature was newer to her; and in the freshness of its budding hopes was all in unison with her own, and from her high seat she gazed on the shifting panorama of meadow and upland, brook and river, farm and village, with feelings and emotions not to be put into words.

True, it was not the smiling month of sun and shower; but the trees had already sipped the wine of spring, and felt it throbbing in the farthest shoot. There was a ruddy flush of flowering bloom on the wych elm and poplar, a tender green on meadow and hedgerow, where the lithe honeysuckle twined among the hawthorn's opening fans; and if only a solitary snowdrop lingered here and there, the crocus boldly lifted up its

purple cup, the unostentatious daffodil by the wayside brook bent its head as it offered its incense to the passing breeze, and the coltsfoot had sent forth its golden stars to tell with perfumed breath that its broad leaves were coming by-and-by. Now and again the love song of the missel thrush was half drowned in the rattle of the wheels; but Muriel felt as if she too must burst into song, so glad, so hopeful, and withal so thankful was she.

She was silent from excess of feeling; but even raptures do not last for hours, and coaches in the last century did not race with the wind.

A little child shivering by her side, to whom she extended the benefit of her cloak at Frodsham, helped to enliven the remainder of the journey with his prattle; but when they reached Preston Brook at 11 o'clock, she was almost too stiff and tired to alight. Her grandmother not more so.

The long, slow-going, ark-like packet boat seemed indeed an ark of refuge after the shaking coach. The gliding motion was restful; she sat at the cabin window, listened to the ripple of the water, the occasional swish of the rope and the tread of feet overhead, watched the trees and houses on the canal bank slip past as in a dream, the glory of all being that she had left Miss Briscoe and Chester for ever, and was going back to the dear mother and sisters who must have missed her so much. The dream was broken in upon by a woman crushing past, who offered Eccles cakes and nettle beer for sale, by way of refreshment; but Mrs. Bancroft had a reticule basket well supplied, and there was tea to be had on board. There had need to be, for it was nearer seven than six o'clock when they reached the Castle wharf at Knott Mill (where Canute's castle is said to have been), and there was neither Sam nor conveyance to meet them.

They waited, the bustling passengers dispersed, yet no one came. Mrs. Bancroft's brows were knit, and her lips set over her strong teeth, telling of disquiet or displeasure, had there been light for Muriel to read the record. And still they waited.

"Do you think uncle received your letter?" asked Muriel at last, in some trepidation. "And what shall we do?"

"Eh! I don't know, child!" brusquely answered the first question, the characteristic "I'll see to it," the second.

There were as yet no hackney coaches, there was no place at hand whereat to hire a chaise. There were, however, sturdy men upon the wharf, one of whom Mrs. Bancroft found willing to act as porter, having sought him, seeing there was no alternative but to take the man's honesty upon trust, and let him lead the way through dark, narrow Alport-street, and along Deansgate,

with Muriel's small hair trunk on his shoulders, and Mrs. Bancroft's bag as a balance in the other hand, and to take the chance of meeting an empty sedan chair by the way.

Neither Muriel nor Mrs. Bancroft cared to show all the alarm she felt; each had a dread of something wrong at home, to say nothing of the dangers of the streets or the two mile walk at the end of a day's journey, but the man must have heard the tremor in Muriel's voice as she asked her grandmother if she thought the man could obtain one of the lanterns then flitting about the wharf among the shadows; for he put down the luggage with a civil, "Yoi, miss, aw thenk aw con!" and in a few minutes a horn lantern was in Muriel's hand, the luggage once more shouldered, and they, thus lit, following closely on the man's heels with apprehension in their hearts.

Remember—for in this Chester was in advance of Manchester—there were as yet no public lamps, only private ones at a few of the better class houses; that respectable women were not supposed to go abroad unattended after dusk; that there was no organised police, that drunkenness was a fashionable vice; that footpads drove a brisk trade; and that the wild young men of the time thought it no shame to insult more peaceable people, even to the drawing of swords; and you will perhaps better understand the apprehension felt alike by the strongminded woman, who had a nice-looking young girl in her charge, and the inexperienced young girl herself.

CHAPTER X.

SAM'S FIRST.

Not until they had gained the stand in St. Ann's Square, where paviors had begun their much-needed work, was an empty sedan to be found, and then so many more intrusive carousers had they met by the way than sober home-going town-folk, that Sarah Bancroft was glad to put her grandchild under the canopy of one, as much for security as conveyance. She scorned the extravagance of such a luxury for herself.

So the sturdy old dame trudged on by its side, glad of the extra lantern swung on one of the forward poles of the sedan, as well as of the additional protection of the two stout chairmen. It was a late hour for reputable females to be abroad unattended.

It was close upon eight by St. Ann's Church clock, when the prim rows of trees which sentinelled the aristocratic mansions in the square were left behind, Mrs. Bancroft congratulating herself that the foul dark entry, with its "Dangerous corner," so recently the only outlet from the square to the Market Place, was done away with, and losing sight of the narrowness of the new Exchange-street, thought only how soon the Exchange itself, with all its pillared façade, would be only a memory—and such a memory! Had she not seen the heads of the Jacobite leaders spiked atop? She supposed the queer, old market cross and the pillory they were passing would be the next to go; things changed so fast since her young days. Her dreams of the past were put to flight by the activities of the present. The clock of the Collegiate or Old Church, towards which their faces were set, chimed the hour, and then the glorious bells rang out the curfew with a resonant dash.

In an off-street close to the shambles stood a dingy old public house, known as the "Punch House," and kept by John Shaw, at one time a dragoon, where throughout the day, and especially from four to eight in the evening, might be found the chief merchants and manufacturers discussing the news of the day and the prices of goods over their sixpenny or shilling jorums of punch, for which the military landlord had a special and occult receipt. But at the first stroke of eight did John Shaw enter his bar parlour with "Eight o'clock, gentlemen; you must clear out." And out they went at the first bidding, for, did anyone presume to linger, the martinet's long-lashed whip cracked in their ears, or in came Molly, his factotum, with mop and pail, and flooded them out.

No one got drunk there. Some of the least steady-going and more exuberant spirits might, however, be primed for finishing the night elsewhere.

The chairmen were jogging along with their light burden under the shade of the overhanging black and white gable-fronted old buildings, not the less shadowy for the dim illumination of casements from within, when, simultaneously with the first clang of the bells, John Shaw drove forth the members of his club, six or eight of whom came on from the narrow byeway, right in front of Mrs. Bancroft's party, one calling to another, "Who's for the Cockpit?" "Who's for the Bull's Head?" "Come you to the play?" "I'm off to the Blue Boar!" and so forth, blocking such pathway as there was. They were in the very height of jollity and merriment, some of them ripe for what they called fun.

"I say, old dame, with the lantern and basket, what treasure have you there you guard so carefully?" cried out one—a tall, elegant man, in a fashionable suit of light blue kerseymere, with shining buckles at his breeches' knees—and he took a step forward as if to ascertain for himself. He stopped short, arrested by a stern, hard voice he knew well.

"Your daughter, John D'Anyer, who is fortunate in having a more faithful guardian than her father this night."

In an instant the long back bent, the Frenchified cylindrical hat was raised from the gentleman's powdered hair with a graceful flourish, not altogether due to John Shaw's punch.

"I—I beg pardon, Mrs. Bancroft; you have quite taken me by surprise. The imperfect light must excuse the discourtesy of my address. But how is it——"

She interrupted him. "Now, sir, don't make matters worse by excuses of that kind; nothing excuses rudeness to an old woman whoever she may——"

She broke off short. She had seen another figure warily edging off into the background as if to beat a retreat; the stealthiness of the action caused her to raise her lantern, and the light fell on the broad buckled shoes, the grey worsted stockings, the steel-buckled brown breeches, brown flap-pocketed waistcoat, wide deep-skirted coat, falling white neckcloth, and disordered hair of her son Sam, with his three-cornered hat somewhat awry—steady-going Sam!

"Stop, sir!" she cried imperatively, and he thought best to obey. "Where art thah sneaking off to? What hast thah done that thah cannot face me? Ay, thah may well be ashamed of leaving thy old mother and a young girl to come through the streets at night as best they could, and at the risk of insult. But I'll see into it. Move on, chairmen."

John D'Anyer was turning the handle of the sedan door, which Muriel could not open from within. She waved him back. "You can see Muriel to-morrow. You were in no such hurry to meet us on the Quay."

John D'Anyer's pride was easily touched.

As she nodded to the men to proceed, and stepped forward herself, heedless of the jests and laughter of the dispersing party from the Punch House, leaving son and son-in-law to follow, or not, as might suit them best, he answered haughtily:—

"As a gentleman, madam, if not as a father, I should have met you at the Quay had your coming been notified. As you did not think proper to acquaint me with your intended return,

and do think proper to refuse me a word with my own daughter, I have no more to say. Good-night to both."

His hat was again raised, but with a sarcastic sweep of ultra-ceremony, as if he bowed their dismissal.

Sam was a decided contrast to his brother-in-law, in more than the old-fashioned homeliness of his attire and manners. He professed to have less pride; he might have added that he had more policy.

They had neither of them taken sufficient punch to cloud their intellects, and, although somewhat elevated, the first shock of the unwelcome surprise had dispelled any vapours from its fumes. John's wounded pride led him to follow a couple of his companions into the open jaws of the Blue Boar, whose lair was a court off the other side the Market Place, where he talked loftily to his intimates of his character as a gentleman being at stake, and he treated the said gentleman to so many soothing potations that he was anything but a gentleman when his rattat-tan on his door knocker roused the echoes of Broom-street at midnight.

Wiser Sam stuck close by his mother; he excused his presence at John Shaw's, and his extra dose of punch, on the plea that a little daughter having arrived that day, he and John had "been merely wetting the child's head." And the excuse was sufficiently cogent, seeing that it was customary for a newly-made father to stand treat under his own roof, or in some bar parlour to pay for the "glasses round," in which the health and long life of the new-born child was toasted and drunk.

She was barely satisfied, but she let it pass.

On like grounds he excused his unpardonable absence from Castle Quay. "His extreme agitation and anxiety for Lydia had driven everything else out of his mind. He had forgotten to send to the Post Office that morning. Her letter of instruction would be lying there."

This was a much more heinous offence. "A business man forget the post!" It sounded incredible. Hers might not be the only important missive lying neglected in Mrs. Willett's window! She was not so easily appeased. Yet Sam made his confession so naturally, and with so many genuine expressions of regret; he had such a firm hold of his mother's heart, and she such a firm belief in his integrity, that she softened at last, and said:—

"Well, Sam, lad, as it is thy first child, it may be excusable, and as thah's come and owned thy forgetfulness all straight up and above board, I may overlook it this time; but, prithee, be

careful in the future. Punctuality and method are the hinges of trade, and a business man has no business to forget."

Sam's face was in deep shadow, so the uneasy expression which crossed it during the first portion of this speech was lost, and her sharply-emphasised rebuke of his untradesmanlike forgetfulness might account for his temporary silence.

Presently, after a trade question or two, she began to ask about Lydia and the newly-born child, wished she had been a day earlier, and said :—

"I'd rather it had been a lad than a lass, for the first ; but we must take what comes."

Again Sam's brows contracted uneasily, and were not smoothed when she bethought herself to ask :—

"Who's with Lydia?"

"Oh—Maggy Blackburn!" he answered, but not readily.

"Maggy Blackburn!" exclaimed his mother, in not too pleasant a tone. "Was there no one to be had nearer home?"

"Yea ; but Lydia has known Maggy all her life, and I thought, as you were away, it was best to humour her, as she seems to have such a hankering after Waverham folk," he responded, as they stopped at his mother's house, having passed his own with a casual glance at the lighted windows, and his hand went up to the door knocker quite unnecessarily, seeing that the door opened with a mere turn of the handle.

Chairmen and porter were glad to exchange their loads for hard cash and foaming home-brewed ale, and, after spitting on the coins for luck, departed.

Muriel, notwithstanding the unsuspected tears shed when her father left her so readily, had fallen asleep by the way, owing as much to the motion of the vehicle as to her fatigue ; and she was but half awake when she followed her grandmother into the large bright kitchen, where the stone floor was scrubbed as clean as the deal tables and painted dresser ; and where Margery had put as bright a polish on the tall clock-case and oaken settle as on the brass and copper utensils on walls and tall mantleshef.

On that same settle lay a boy about four years old, in clothes of a countrified cut, though they were good and respectable enough. He was a rosy-cheeked chubby fellow, and was fast asleep.

"Whose lad's this?" demanded Mrs. Bancroft, as sharply and briskly as if her journey and two miles' walk were of no account.

"Eh? A nurse choilt Maggy Blackburn browt wi' her fro' Waverham. Hoo (she) said hoo couldn't come bout.(without) it.

Measter browt it here to-day, to be out o' the way," explained Margery, all in a fluster with the unexpected arrivals, and full of grief that there was "ne'er a foire anywheere but i' th' kitchen, and nowt but ham an' eggs for supper. Yo' moight ha' letten folks know."

"Never mind, Margery. If grandmother's as tired as I am, she won't care what she has for supper, or where she sits," said Muriel, dropping wearily to a seat on the settle beside the sleeping boy, on whom Mrs. Bancroft's keen glance was fixed.

"Sup, oh, anywhere," said the latter somewhat impatiently, as she left the kitchen to meet Sam in the passage. To him she put the same question she had put to Margery, to be answered again:—

"A nurse child of Maggy Blackburn's. She couldn't leave it with them rough sons of hers, so she brought him with her. She thought, as he was but a little chap, we shouldno' mind."

"Maggy Blackburn all out!" remarked the old lady, seemingly satisfied with this explanation, if not with Nurse Blackburn's easy assurance; and by the time their outer wraps were removed, and the savoury supper smoking on the board, her temporary irritation had vanished.

Still, her eyes strayed from the plate to the sleeping boy, as if there was something in his form or face which puzzled her; and Sam was not sorry when she proposed that the child should be carried to bed, saying it was "not fit to take the little fellow through the night air at that hour, whoever he belonged to."

"Whew!" he whistled to himself when well clear of his mother's door, "that storm's blown over; if ever I neglect to send for the letters again may I be hanged! And how she looked at the lad. I'd stand a guinea to know what she thought, that I would! Well, I may tell Lydia the danger's over now, though it's been a close shave."

Thinking thus, and having escaped a dreadful catastrophe, it was with lightened feet and spirits he trod the uneven and winding way down Red Bank and Long Millgate, under the shadow of gable-fronted cottages (long since swept away), heedlessly stumbling over outlying steps, and at last coming into violent collision with one of the newly-appointed watchmen as he turned the sharp corner abruptly into Toad Lane, where he lived in one of his mother's houses; a row of which rose with the rising ground on the right hand trending towards Hyde's Cross.

"Neaw then, tha drunken foo! What dost mean?" blurted out angrily the custodian of the peace, steadying himself on the narrow path.

"Heigho!" cried Sam simultaneously and prophetically, "I think *this* might be called 'Dangerous Corner' with a vengeance!" and he gave himself a shake to restore his balance.

"A dangerous corner belike to thee, for I've haue a mind to tak' thee t' th' watchheause t' gie an acceawnt o' thisel';" and the lantern went up into the disconcerted face of Sam.

He had to put his hand in his pocket to find the heavily-coated man of lantern, rattle, and many capes, a heal-all, and having given a shilling where he meant to give a groat, that sent him home a little less elated, and the mollified watchman contentedly on his way, bawling lustily: "Past ten o'clock, and a clear, dry night!"

Maggy Blackburn, a thin, little woman, with cold, light-grey eyes, and what had been a ruddy face, dressed in a dark-blue linen bed-gown (or loose jacket) and linsey petticoat, with a white linen long-eared cap or mutch to keep her straggling grey locks in order, opened the door for him, and before he could say, "How's Lydia?" began to ask "Wheer's the lad? Theer's no gettin' thoi wife to rest till ehe knows he's safe in th' heause."

At his answer, the woman, for many reasons a privileged individual in that household, uplifted both hands and voice: "Thy mother come back! an' seen th' lad! Eh! but I wouldna stand i' thy shoes, Sam Bancroft, for summat! Thy mother has eyes to see through a brick wall."

It was an ancient black-and-white timber-and-rubble house, with short passages, queer turnings, odd stairs here and there, rooms of various sizes, shapes, and levels, intersected by beams, and lit by diamond-paned transomed windows. There was no lobby, or entrance hall, the door opened into the common household room, an oaken partition, or spear, about two yards high, which projected far into the room from the doorway, alone serving to screen the inmates from draughts, and maintain a show of privacy when strangers came to the door to make inquiries. Out of this room, almost in a line with the door, up two or three stairs, lay the short passage to the kitchen, to the dark and tortuous staircase, and to another room lit by diamond-paned, mullioned windows back and front. This, which had been comfortably furnished as a best parlour, and was kept in the most admirable order, went down a step or two; and it was into this room, where a light was burning on a snap table, Mr. Samuel had led the way, closing the door before he had committed himself to answer; when he did it was with a sort of wink:—

"But what if dust be thrown in the eyes, Maggy?" and he slapped his thigh as if well pleased at his own dust throwing;

the wisdom of the punch bowl in his self-satisfied half-shut optics.

"Some folks' eyes won't hold dust long. They may be blinded for a bit, but they see noan th' waur afterwards. I'd noan have left Jem behind. Folk as have secrets conna be too careful. But take thi shoon off an' come gradely up the stairs, an' tell Lydia it's a' reet. She'll happen believe you. I don't."

And if Samuel Bancroft could have known how the face of that sleeping boy haunted the pillow of his mother, as a vague dream of something remembered through the mist of years, he would not have assured his anxious wife so glibly that it was "all right."

His confidence, however, served to set poor Lydia's aching heart at rest for the time ; and when he kissed her and the babe and said "good night," and went off to the spare bedroom, she closed her eyelids and went to sleep contentedly, with none of the misgivings that had troubled her mind for years, and which somehow seemed transferred to the brain of Sarah Bancroft.

Even with the many cares of her large business on her mind—business which she was no longer assured had been under vigilant supervision in her long absence, and which summoned her from sleep to work rooms and ware rooms at five in the morning, when the workmen entered the gate—she thought of him ; nay, even in the midst of calculations during her hasty breakfast, she could pause to watch the boy eating his bowl of porridge by the side of Muriel, and ask his name.

"Jem," was the shy response.

"Jem what ?"

"Maggy's Jem."

"And what besides ?"

"Mammy's Jem."

"And who's your mammy ?"

The boy looked with wondering eyes from Mrs. Bancroft to Muriel, but only replied, "Why, mammy's mammy."

He knew no more, and he could tell no more.

CHAPTER XI.

MURIEL'S RETURN HOME.

It was well Muriel had been schooled in self-control, for the morning passed, noon came, dinner was despatched, and yet Mrs. Bancroft, who had sent for the delayed letters, could not spare time from her own pressing concerns to accompany the girl home, and she had forbidden her to go alone.

She took little Jem by the hand into the shed and warehouse to show how furs were dressed and prepared. The powdered lime, the smells, and the fluff soon drove them back. Then, keeping him still with her, she went for a stroll down Roger's Brow to see her cousin Milly—or Millicent—Hargreaves, whose father's dyeworks lay almost behind Mrs. Bancroft's place, but close to the river side, his house adjoining the works. They went through great gates, and a grassy croft set with rows of stout posts that bristled with spiky hooks, into a wet yard overlooked by the buildings which covered in the dye pits, where men in coarse woollen overshirts, and thick clumsy leggings, with bare arms all red, or brown, or blue, went clattering about in clogs away from the carboys and dye stuffs, hanging up dripping hanks of yarn or pieces of cloth on the lines or tenter hooks to dry, and the boy stared on all with wondering eyes.

When they had picked their way to the house, Muriel was sorry to hear that Milly was away, but Mrs. Hargreaves found them some cake, and promised that Milly should soon come to see her in Broom-street; and as they went back through the yard they were met by the dyer himself, as rough-looking with his clogs and leggings, and indigo-stained arms, as one of his own workpeople.

He shook hands heartily with Muriel, leaving his mark on her palm, asked a few questions, then, eyeing the boy askance, patted him on the head, saying :

"And what little chap's this? He favours thi Uncle Sam, I'll be hanged if he don't."

"He comes from Waverham. A woman they call Maggy Blackburn brought him with her. He says his name's Jem, and does not seem to know any other."

"Oh!" was all his acknowledgment of Muriel's answer; but when she went away, disappointed at not seeing Milly, he looked after them, and gave a long whistle.

The banks of the Irk were not then all built upon. There were green spots here and there. She gathered a bunch of wild

spring flowers as they went back, for the chattering little one ; then in the house again, sat down to sing ballads and hymns, and to play on the harpsichord, as much to still her impatience as to amuse the child.

She had a marvellously musical voice, and as its liquid notes floated through the rooms, Margery put down her work to listen ; and, putting her head in at the open door, said : " Eh ! but aw fair thowt it wur an angel singin, aw did ! "

" I don't feel very like an angel, Margery," she said with a laugh. " My feet are tingling with impatience to be off," and she rose to consult the tall kitchen clock, as she had done many times during the morning.

For not only was she most impatient to see those from whom she had been so long parted, but she feared to incur her father's displeasure, and excite her dearly-loved mother's anxiety by lingering there, now that her return to Manchester was known.

Yet it was close upon three o'clock before Mrs. Bancroft looked into the front parlour, where Muriel sat with little Jem in the window seat, showing the pictures in the big Bible (which, apart from order book and ledger, constituted the family library) to keep him quiet, and said : " Be sharp and put your things on, and that lad's too. We may leave him at your Aunt Lydia's as we go."

Be sure no second bidding was needed. Up started Muriel, forgetting in her haste to put back the big Bible in its place on the bureau. It went no further than the table, and there Sarah Bancroft found it at night. She was closing it with a mental reproof of Muriel's carelessness, when her eye was caught by a word or two of the large type. She sat down ; the resolve made in Chester by her grandchild's bedside came freshly to mind. The great book which had lain so long on the bureau unopened, like so many a Family Bible, as a sort of dumb guarantor of the family Christianity, the silent custodian of its religion, lay with the seventh chapter of Matthew open before her, to strike, as it were, a shaft into her soul :

" Judge not, that ye be not judged."

Was it Muriel who had been careless, or herself ? Muriel had left the book *open*, she had more carelessly left it closed.

She sat down, and read, and pondered ; that woman, whose faith was in herself, whose soul was in her business, and as she read began to wonder if *she* was building her house on the rock, or on the sand ?

However she answered the question to herself, she was more careful of the sacred volume in the future. During the week she

was at business from early morning until late at night, but every Sunday afternoon, when she was alone, it came from its long resting place to be read and studied.

Not too soon. There were disturbing influences at work, and the woman who had rested on herself so long, needed to find "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

But we are hastening too fast through that busy day. Muriel was well pleased to find her grandmother in a hurry; her own young feet had such a tendency to outstrip both the younger and the older ones.

Curious as Muriel had been to know what sort of a person was her Uncle Sam's wife, the introduction to the new aunt and cousin in the darkened room was soon over, and left her not much the wiser. The face she saw on the pillow had a sort of faded prettiness, though there was an ingrained colour on her cheeks, and the lips were close set when not speaking. And she was surely more than twenty-five, thought the niece, who had been told her age. But she had no desire to linger; even the pink baby had no charm to hold her that afternoon.

Indeed, she thought her grandmother wasted time asking the queer nurse unnecessary questions about little Jem, and it was with quiet satisfaction that she gave him a kiss and wished him "good-bye," her face radiant with hope and expectation.

Yet the question Sarah Bancroft had put to Maggy Blackburn had staggered the Waverham nurse, and her close-set eyes contracted under catechism. She was, however, equal to any emergency, and her answers were satisfactorily true to the letter if not to the spirit. The catastrophe was averted—for the time.

With head erect, as befitted Miss Briscoe's pupil, Muriel tripped on lightly, glad that her grandmother only nodded to people she met in the crowded thoroughfare about Hyde's Cross, instead of stopping to speak; but when at length the exclusive posts and chains of Broom-street were gained, and she saw her father standing without hat on their own doorstep, all Miss Briscoe's lessons in deportment were forgotten.

Children even in their teens were kept at formidable distances in those days, but human nature is stronger than custom. Muriel set off at a run to throw herself into his arms. Had she been alone he might have closed them round her in a fatherly embrace, for there is no doubt he had missed her. But the irritation of the previous night had not passed away with the fumes of John D'Anyer's potations. He had been called to order in the open street before both his own friends and common

porters. He had been unwarrantably taxed with ungentleman-like neglect, and anything more galling to the great foible of the fustian manufacturer was not possible. He had gone in from the warehouse to the noontide meal expecting to find his long-absent daughter dutifully waiting to salute him with filial respect and affection. Her absence he had construed into a want of both, on her part, and as an intentional affront on that of Mrs. Bancroft. His amiable little wife had only made matters worse by suggesting excuses.

Several matters had gone wrong in the warehouse that afternoon—pieces of fustian had been spoiled in the cutting—and it did not improve matters when he came in the house at four o'clock for his tea, and saw no signs of Muriel. Instead of sitting down, he walked impatiently to the front door, and thus it was that the girl's open-armed advance received a check.

"I think, Miss, as you have been so long in finding your way home, you might almost as well go back where you came from."

"O father!" exclaimed Muriel in a tone of deep disappointment, as she clasped her open hands together in pain, and stopped short.

"She can do that, John D'Anyer, if she be not welcome here!" cried Mrs. Bancroft, coming up in time to hear him. "And if that's all the greeting thah has for the lass who pined for the sight of you all till she could not eat her dinner, I think she is likely to go back sooner than thah counts for."

But Muriel had seen another figure in the hall, and flying past her father, who made way for her, was locked in the embrace of her dear mother, deaf and blind to all the world besides.

Sisters, too, just home from school, book-bag and slate in hand, came rushing in the back way to surround and overwhelm her with kisses and questions, and drag her into the back sitting-room, where the tea table was set, the toast and teapot being kept warm on a brass stool in front of the fire.

Meanwhile John D'Anyer, bowing stiffly to his wife's mother, ushered her ceremoniously into the front parlour before she spoke another word.

Much less ceremonious, she began first:

"See thi, John, I took that dear good lass away because I saw there was no proper place for her either on thy hearth or in thy heart. And if——"

She was interrupted.

"May I ask, madam, on what grounds you thus heap insult on indignity? You profess to have gauged my heart. I'm afraid you have not gauged my patience, which is not so long as

to tolerate unfounded accusations even from Mrs. Bancroft, no later than last night.

It was her turn to interrupt.

"Stay, John; Sam was to blame for that. I had written desiring thee or him to be on the quay to meet the packet. It was not until we had parted in the Market Place that I discovered thah wert not in fault—that my letter was still at the Post Office—had not been sent for, in fact—and I am sorry I spoke so hastily. But I found what politeness an unknown old woman was likely to have met from thee and thi friends; and I found Samuel amongst the roysterers."

The listener bowed in acknowledgment of the apology, reddened as he found the tables turned upon him, but smiled covertly when Sam was mentioned.

"Ah, yes! wetting the child's head in John Shaw's punch!"

"Ay, and disturbing his own! Now, John D'Anyer," and she laid her mittened hand upon his coat sleeve, "thah'st a strong head and can stand carousing. Sam is not used to it. He would not have gone to the Punch House but for thee. Don't *thah* lead him into bad habits."

Astonishment, incredulity, scorn, sat on her interlocutor's handsome visage. He waved his hand loftily.

"Mr. Samuel Bancroft, madam, is not one to be led. Leading strings are not for men of *his* years and cool temperament. Mr. Samuel may certainly be trusted to take care of himself."

"So I thought till last night." And Mrs. Bancroft untied her bonnet strings and sat down meditatively.

But he said no more, not even that he found his brother-in-law at the Punch House before him; such admission being contrary to his code of honour. And he scarcely came down from his stilts all the evening, though he did take Muriel in his arms at last, did extol her growth and upright carriage, and sent her to her sisters in a flush of delight. But he spoiled all by saying before she was fairly out of hearing, "What a fright that cropped head makes of the lass." He had last seen her with her hair rippling in waves below her waist.

"Be thankful you've got the lass back safe, crop or no crop," jerked out the old woman, who had been talking to her daughter about Lydia, and just overheard him.

"Ay, mother," assented the younger one, as she poured out the tea, "we may be well content to let her hair go, so that we may have her back safe and sound, seeing she has been so ill."

"Tchut! What has that to do with the lass being a fright? Would you have me thankful for *that*? Women have no

sense!" Then having vented his explosive, John D'Anyer turned the conversation, "Did you do any trade in Chester before you came back?" And Mrs. Bancroft, launching into her natural theme, lost her irritation.

This was not a very auspicious home-coming for Muriel. She could not forget her glimpse through the sedan window of her father and his companions, or the fright she had before he was recognised, and he, on his part, could not forget that she had so seen him. The want of cordiality in his first greeting was followed by a restraint not observed towards the others. He was conscious that his eldest daughter had seen him at a disadvantage, had seen him guilty of an act of discourtesy to an elderly stranger in the street, and wounded self-esteem suggested that her respect for him and his authority would thereby be lessened. In the clear eyes which said plainly enough, "Why am I not loved like the rest?" he read only the glance of a searching spirit to probe his soul, and not feeling comfortable himself, he was not likely to set her at ease. Added to that, the Reign of Terror in France, and the declaration of war with that country, affected English commerce, and he began to feel it. Annoyance on 'Change or in the warehouse meant irritability at home, and polite sarcasm on his own hearth, of which Ellen had hitherto had the chief benefit. Now, Muriel, throwing herself, as it were, as a soft cushion between them, came in for more than her share of his ill-humours and suspicions, nay, the very alacrity with which she ran to anticipate his wishes only increased his disfavour. "A pair of meek lackeys without a grain of spirit," he styled them on one occasion in his scornful cups; and yet the man could be generous and noble on occasion.

Nor were her sisters more amiable after the first few days. They felt themselves superseded, and began to be jealous of her superior manner and accomplishments, as one after another, aunts and cousins, came in and noticed her and her needlework with outspoken admiration. Not so much the silken nosegay on the wall, in its circular gold frame, so prettily reflected in the circular convex mirror between the velvet curtained windows opposite, or the filigree basket on the folded card table beneath the mirror, or the pair of tent-stitch footstools guarding the polished steel fender; as the embroidered portrait, which she sat in the light of one window to finish.

It was this which, being a novelty, eclipsed the nosegay, and was pronounced far beyond competition by the fingers of either cousin or sister. It was a tangible evidence of her superior endowments; since such work was only turned out of schools of

high standing ; and the minor matters of grammar, history, geography, and arithmetic were thereby guaranteed.

Moreover, it was a well-painted picture of a comely girl in a white dress, crimson shoes, and sash, adorned with a gold-rimmed locket set with pearls, and with a glorious mass of brown hair flowing and rippling far below her waist. Over-arching trees and a background of bushes threw out the graceful figure, which seemed in motion, as did the fluttering canary on her finger, the ribbon which seemed to hold it safe, the floating ends of her sash, and the folds of her white robe.

The artist had been quite equal to his task, and the portraiture was faithful.

Marion and Anna envied the distinction. What right had she to have her portrait taken any more than they ? And the feeling oozed out one day when Milly Hargreaves was present, admiring the picture, of which the hair, flesh, and sky were as the painter left them.

"It's well the painter put no marks on the skin to spoil its beauty," said Anna spitefully.

"Painters never do, even in large pictures," answered observant Milly. "Didn't the painter leave the wart off Cromwell's face ?"

"Well, I'm sure Muriel's hair was never so long or beautiful as that !" asserted Marion, whose raven locks only rested on her shoulders.

"I dare say it was," struck in little Sara chivalrously, seeing the crimson rising in good-natured Muriel's cheeks. "Didn't you cry when they cut it all off ?"

"No, love ; I was too ill." And Muriel sighed.

"Never mind, Muriel. It is sure to grow again," said Milly reassuringly, as she noticed the moisture gathering in the mild brown eyes.

"I don't mind my hair, Milly—that is—(she corrected herself) I should not mind, but father does not like me without it," and the moisture rounded to a tear.

"That's a very pretty locket," said Milly, still looking at the picture, with a kindly desire to change the subject. "Have you one like it ?"

"Yes ; the lady whose chaise broke down in Delamere Forest gave it to me."

"Gave it to you ? What for ?"

"You may well ask what for ?" jerked out Marion. "People are always giving her things. What did mother give her the old silver-clasped Bible for, I should like to know ?"

"Ah, and grandmother gave her a fur muff and tippet, but she didn't give us any!" added Anna, crossly.

"Perhaps she will when you are older," suggested Milly; but I should like to see the locket and hear all about it." And when she did hear all about it, Milly, who was half a year older and a bit of a sentimentalist, went into ecstasies about the romantic adventure, and the handsome young officer connected therewith, running into a whole chapter of possibilities and probabilities. At which Miss Marion again turned up her long nose.

From this it will be seen that the fair blossoms of kindness did not spring up in Muriel's path at home.

Little Sara loved her, clung to her, slept in her arms at night, followed her about in the day, came to her hornbook in hand for help up the first and hardest steps to knowledge, or for a romp when work was over; but Marion and Anna took the cue from their father, and in small indescribable ways strove "to bring the lady down a peg," especially Anna, who for some occult reason was his favourite.

At the same time they did not hesitate to take her gifts, or to tax her skill and obliging nature to the utmost, and scarcely gave thanks for the willing service.

Besides Sara, the only appreciative being in the household was her mother, and her smile was Muriel's ample reward. Was John D'Anyer fastidious palate to be catered for, or baking, pickling, preserving, wine making about, Muriel's untiring activity might be counted on; but whence came her patience and cheeriness under discouragement only her good mother knew.

She, however, had not been at home quite a fortnight when her mother, whose stay-at-home habits were proverbial, taking advantage of her husband's absence on a business journey, and of a fine day, said she thought it was about time she went to see Lydia, and that if Muriel felt inclined she might bear her company.

The April sunshine was not brighter than the smile of Muriel as she tripped upstairs for her hat and cloak, and she carried something of the sunshine into the quaint old house and the shaded chamber where sat Lydia in a big easy chair between the heavily-draped fourpost bed and the fire. She was wrapped in a blanket, had a pillow beneath her feet, and pillows behind her, all tokens of Maggy Blackburn's good nursing. Little Jem, seated on a low stool by the fender, had fallen fast asleep with his head resting against her knee. Her right hand lay

caressingly on his head when they opened the door, but it was calmly folded in the other across her waist when they had made the circuit of the bed, and stood before her.

"How do you do, Aunt?" said Muriel in a low voice, accompanied by a graceful courtesy.

"How do you find yourself by this time, Lydia?" was Mrs. D'Anyer's first salutation, as she held her hand to the fire to take the chill off before offering it to her sister-in-law; "your nurse says you are both doing well."

"Ay, pretty well. But I thought you had forgotten me, Ellen," was the faint reply.

"Nay, I had not. Rheumatism came with the March winds, as usual, so I had to wait for fine weather and less pain, or you would have seen me sooner. So that's the little lad your nurse brought with her," Mrs. D'Anyer exclaimed as the boy's brown head caught her attention. "I think she took a great liberty, don't you?"

"Oh, no," answered Lydia, with the least possible tremor in her voice, which her hearers ascribed to weakness, "we knew she could not come without him."

"But what induced you to send so far for a nurse so encumbered? I could have recommended a very trustworthy person close at hand. Mother tells me she comes from Delamere, from the very heart of the Forest."

Lydia shifted her head as if to change her position and shade her face from the fire which had leapt into a blaze. "Well, her house is a goodish step from Waverham, but I've known Maggy all my life, and thought I should like her better than a stranger," was answered wearily.

At that moment in came the said Maggy, with cake and candle on a tray for the visitors, checking Mrs. D'Anyer's next remark, "Mother says she has a very queer—" before the words "character from the Kingsley's," could be spoken. But whether Maggy overheard the speech or divined the thought, both Muriel and her mother were struck with the searching and anything but pleasant gleam of her light grey eyes, which seemed as though they would transfix the arrested speaker while she bent her long back to wait upon them.

And Muriel thought the long ears of her linen mutch flapped as if shaken whilst she interposed with the voice of one in authority, "Yo' munna talk so much, Lydia, till yo're stronger—and maybe, ma'am, as yo' seem to be a mother you'll bear me out. Oi've not ower much loikin' for early visitors mysel'; they dun moore harm than good."

"Hush, Maggy," feebly remonstrated Mrs. Sam, "that lady is Mrs. D'Anyer, my sister-in-law, and I have not been talking much."

"Moore than yo' shouldn', oi've a notion," put in the woman with another strange look.

Mrs. D'Anyer rose; there was small inducement to prolong her visit. "Show us the infant, nurse," she said, with some little dignity, "and then we will retire."

The sleeping infant was lifted out of bed for inspection, duly kissed and admired, and then Muriel said, "I will come and nurse her for you, if mother with allow me, aunt. I used to nurse my poor brother George. How I wish *she* was a boy. Don't you, aunt?"

The aunt's reply was inaudible.

"You must not tease your aunt," said her mother, putting a gratuity into the hand of Maggy Blackburn; and then they departed. Neither observed that there were tears on the lashes of Lydia's closed eyes, or that her hand went back in a caress to the head of the still sleeping boy against her knee, as they turned away. Did she, too, wish that her first-born had been a boy?"

"We may as well walk on to Red Bank now I am out, as your father will not be home until to-morrow, and after dinner you can run and see your cousin Milly whilst I have a quiet hour with your grandmother," said Mrs. D'Anyer, turning down hill towards Long Millgate, then a long, narrow, and busy thoroughfare, between houses of all shapes and sizes, from the new red-brick mansion to the rickety frame-built cottage of the working man; some up steps, some down steps, with here and there a bay-windowed shop, where the light struggled through small panes set in thick frames. On the left, dark entries and narrow alleys ran steeply down the sandstone bank to the very margin of the river Irk, and shut it out of sight. Shut out of sight, too, if not of smell, the tanneries and dyehouses also on its margin, and the fair gardens and bleacherfts across the stream.

Two or three streets broke the line on the townward side, and on both more than one painted sign intimated that there might be had "good entertainment for man and beast."

On the lowest and outside step of one of these (the Queen Anne, whose painted effigy over the door was in good preservation), stood James Hargreaves, with his sleeves rolled up, his bare arms yellow with fustic, his leather breeches and leggings displaying samples of many dyes, just as rough looking as when at his own works, more than a quarter of a mile away. He was, however, well known, and appearances were nothing to him, whatever

they might be to his companion, a bleacher named Walker, whose croft lay across the unseen river, but whose attire showed no such intimacy with his vats and bucking keirs. Their two wives were closely related, and they had business connections likewise to draw them together.

"Why, Ellen, is that thee! the sight's good for sore een! What's brought thee so far?" and out went the great yellow hand to grip hers heartily.

Before she could answer that she had "been to see how Lydia was getting on, the bleacher had also put forth a claim to notice; and James Hargreaves, chucking his niece under the chin with a couple of yellow fingers, said in a tone of pleasant banter, "So, Muriel, lass, you've begun betimes! Milly says you picked up a sweetheart in the wilds of Delamere. Nothing less than a handsome young officer, and under the very nose of your grandmother!"

Muriel was abashed; her colour rose. She could only say, "Oh, uncle!" in a tone of remonstrance.

Her mother came to her aid. "Don't talk such nonsense to the girl, James. And your Milly ought to know better. Muriel was not twelve years old when she met those people in Delamere, and it is more than three years since she saw one of them."

As if reminded by association with Delamere, he remembered Lydia, and remembered something else. "I say, didn't thah see th' little lad from Waverham at Sam's?" he asked curiously.

"Yes, surely."

"What dost a' think of him?"

"He was asleep, with his head against Lydia's knee. I did not see his face."

"Then Lydia taks to th' lad? Oho! Well, look at him when thah goes again, and tell us."

And with a nod and a chuckle, and an injunction that they should "go and see th' old woman and Milly," he turned into the Queen Anne after Mr. Walker, leaving Mrs. D'Anyer and Muriel to wonder what there was remarkable to see in the boy.

There was the tinkle of a workyard bell, then of another, and another, and a clatter of clogs on the stony pavement, of voices hailing one another, and the roads were alive with men and women, lads and lasses, and poor wee children hurrying home from dyeworks, bleachworks, tanneries, factories, all bearing some tokens of their various callings in dress or person, the stains of some, the odour or the fluff of others.

"Poor little things," said Muriel, as two barefooted and ragged urchins of nine or ten years ran against her at the corner, "how hard it must be for them to get up at four in the morning, and

work in a buzzing factory all day, when the sun is shining in the sky and there are buttercups in the meadows. I never thought how much worse other children were off than myself when I was at Miss Briscoe's.

"No, my dear, we are all naturally selfish, and in our own sorrows are apt to forget the greater ones of others; perhaps because we know and feel our own, and can only imagine those of others. But we must make haste or your grandmother will have sat down to dinner before we get there."

In another minute they were on Scotland Bridge; there was another stoppage. Samuel Bancroft, hastening home to his dinner, met them.

After ordinary greetings, Mrs. D'Anyer began:

"Sam, whose boy is that at your house? James Hargreaves has just asked me to look at him and say——"

Sam scowled. "Hang James Hargreaves!" he cried irritably. "Let him mind his own business. What's Maggy Blackburn's nursechild to him, or to you either?" he added sharply. "That's Maggy's affair. I never asked her."

"Well, Sam, you need not get into a passion. I only repeated what——"

Again Sam interrupted:

"Yes, *only repeated*: that's the way mischief is made. I reckon you're going up to Red Bank to '*only repeat*' there. But I tell you what, Ellen, and you, Muriel, too, you'd best not say anything you see or hear about *my* house up *there*, or you'll find yourselves in the wrong box;" and with a monitory nod he stalked on.

He was not given to think aloud, or to mutter as he went, but with his lips close set his thoughts kept pace with his steps, and thus they ran:

"Hang it all! This comes of giving way to Lydia. A pretty coil there'll be if mother gets hold of the clue. It was sure some imp of mischief kept me from the post-office that day, and sent the poor little lad right in mother's way. It's confoundedly awkward, confoundedly!" And whilst he meditated he scratched his chin, and looked vacantly at the ground as he went. Presently a cunning gleam shot into his eyes; he found a cause for self-gratulation. "It was lucky I met Ellen and Muriel. I've got to know what's in the wind, and that's something. And I think I've frightened both of them into silence. Neither one or the other has the courage of a mouse, and I'd lay odds they say nothing to mother that's likely to come back to me."

He was right so far, that nothing was said, but whether from lack of courage, or from lack of interest in the subject, or the pressure of more interesting topics, is another matter.

Ellen D'Anyer had certainly remarked to Muriel:—

“Your Uncle Sam seems put out about that boy; and no wonder. He's not overfond of children, and I dare say he is savage at the nurse bringing another person's child into his house to be kept. Perhaps your grandmother has been grumbling about it. I knew she said it was like Maggy Blackburn's impudence to bring it. So we had best say nothing about it; we may only make mischief. Lydia seems half afraid of the woman, and it's not safe to offend her, seeing how often your father has to cross the forest, and the rough character of her two sons. You know they narrowly escaped the gallows over the attack on that captain's servant.”

“Yes; Mrs. Kingsley told me. She said there had been some false swearing, or they would never have got off. Perhaps Aunt Lydia only had her for a nurse on account of Uncle Sam's travelling.”

However this might be, Uncle Sam's courage led him to disturb his sick wife's serenity that day by grumbling at the presence of both Maggy and little Jem, and to eat his dinner with no worse relish for leaving her in tears.

And when Muriel went a few days later to inquire after her Aunt Lydia, she found her downstairs, weak and low spirited, with a fretful child, and no nurse or attendant but a rough servant lass not more than fourteen.

Sam had “bundled Maggy and the boy both off,” with little apparent regard either for his wife's condition or her tears.

Lydia did not say this, she merely explained that “Maggy Blackburn was obliged to go back to Cheshire, and I am very sorry, for I cannot keep baby quiet.”

“Let me try,” said Muriel, and walking about the room with the velvet face nestled to her own, she lulled it to sleep after a time. Then, seeing Lydia was making feeble attempts to “put the disordered room to rights,” she bade her sit down and she would do it.

When Sam came in for his tea he saw Muriel installed in the place of Maggy Blackburn, with her mother's approval, she having hurried home to obtain it.

“I found Aunt Lydia all alone, with the baby crying on her lap, and her eyes were red as if she was fretting over her own inability to manage it,” she had said, nothing doubting her own accuracy.

Fretting, from whatever cause, is not conducive to a patient's recovery, and quite three weeks more elapsed before Lydia was strong enough to take charge of her own household affairs.

"You're born for a nurse, Muriel, in spite of your grandmother," Sam had said before she had been there many days.

Lydia had seemed to appreciate the gentleness of her tone, manner, and movements, and the unwonted daintiness with which her meals were served, and both were hearty and sincere in their thanks when she left; but for all that she had a lurking suspicion that they would feel her absence a relief.

"There's no place like home, mother dear," said she, as she untied her bonnet strings in their own snug sitting room; "I did not feel much like home at Uncle Sam's, and I don't think Aunt Lydia feels so either, she sighed so heavily if I chanced to mention Delamere or the Kingsleys, or the Wynnes; I could see she checked herself in speaking and shut her mouth tight. She never seems free and open, but always under some restraint, especially when Uncle Sam is there, and I am afraid she is unhappy."

"Maybe so, my dear; long courtships and late marriages do not always ensure felicity, whatever your grandmother may think."

Nor did early and hasty ones, if her own might be taken as a sample. Not that John D'Anyer did not estimate his wife in his best moods; but he set so much larger an estimate on himself, was so thoroughly imbued with personal vanity, and his claim to gentility, though his own father was only a manufacturer, had such extravagant ideas of his supreme right as lord and master to worship and obedience, and was so easily flattered out of doors into excesses which sent him home in his worst moods, that the poor little wife might have been excused had she joined her mother in deprecating early marriages.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE.

It has been intimated that Muriel's homecoming had not been the unmixed joy she had anticipated. The severe discipline and hardships of her school life had been shared with others. In the school there was no favouritism, and if she suffered more it was from her greater sensibility and long isolation from her kith and kin. Returning, she had found that long absence had apparently weakened the bonds of sisterhood, that the accomplishments she had acquired so painfully served only to mark her out for envy, and that she was no nearer to the heart of her father. Well was it that hers was not a rebellious disposition. She had learned self-repression almost from her cradle, so early was the ban of ugliness set upon her, and the doctrine, that "only goodness could atone for her want of good looks," inculcated. Father, aunts, uncles, all harped on the same string, the latter adding jests and banter to their admonitions. Only her mother refrained, and to that mother she clung, as to a superior being, whose amiability she could never hope to equal.

And there she might be right, for Mrs. D'Anyer's amiability was not that of inane weakness, but of a self-subdued will, and hourly self-sacrifice for the preservation of domestic peace.

There was some compensation for Muriel in the regard of her aged grandparents, the D'Anyers, and in the clinging affection of little Sara, and even in the satisfaction with which Lydia hailed her coming whenever baby Lyd was tedious, because she "had such a winning way with the child," or in Milly Hargreaves' many sentimental confidences. And it so happened that handsome, spoiled, wayward Milly, having no sisters of her own, had singled out Muriel in their earliest childhood as the one cousin to supply the want, and to be loved and trusted above the rest. Certainly, whenever Muriel stayed with her grandmother Bancroft there was Millicent to be found also,—playmates in infancy, companions as girlhood grew and ripened.

Muriel was often at her Uncle Sam's. Not that Lydia was particularly sociable, but she fancied her aunt was isolated and desponding, and that the baby wanted better nursing and more fresh air. So with Sara by her side, she would take the long-robed infant in her arms and stroll up Red Bank, or to the Horrocks in quest of Milly, bringing Sara back with a store of summer posies gathered by the way.

Of course, this soon came to John D'Anyer's ears. His pride

took fire. He was "indignant that *his* daughter, who had not been suffered to nurse her own brother, should have no more pride or self-respect than to turn amateur nursemaid to anybody's child, least of all that of his brother-in-law's countrified wife!" And in his indignation, he stigmatised his wife and daughter both to the informant and to their faces, as "spiritless lackeys," a term of opprobrium by no means new, but this time it travelled further than he intended.

Mrs. Bancroft came in one afternoon with her tucked-up gown and black mode scarf, and a set purpose in every line of her face.

She met Muriel in the passage.

"Well, child, I hear that roses don't grow without thorns in these parts," she said meaningly.

"Nor in any parts, grandmother; but Miss Williams taught me how to blunt their points."

Into the sitting room she marched.

"So, Ellen, I hear you and Muriel are a pair of 'spiritless lackeys.' But I'll see that Muriel plays lackey no more, either for John or Lydia, or those lazybone sisters of hers. She goes back to Chester at the fair."

"Goes back there!" and timid Mrs. D'Anyer looked appalled.

"Yes, Mrs. Hopley offered to take her as an apprentice. I didn't see it then, but I do now. Trade's bad, very bad, likely to be worse; food's rising in price. Ah, you may well sigh, with so many mouths to feed, and John making bad debts. I've a notion he may whistle for that money from America. It's ill-dealing with credit customers o'er sea. Cash or barter trade is safe trade. John's ower venturesome. It's much if he don't burn his fingers some day. It may be a good thing if one of the girls gets a trade in her fingers. Not that Muriel will ever need it. I'll see to that; but it may be useful and saving amongst a family of girls."

"And what shall I do?" asked Ellen ruefully; she had found in Muriel a companion as well as a helper, such as the younger ones could never be.

"Do! Why, set that lazy Marion and Anna to work. They'll shed no tears for their sister if they do for their 'lackey.'" The word must have galled Sarah Bancroft, she made so much of it.

"But, mother, Anna and Marion still go to school, they have their lessons to learn at home, they cannot help me; besides, Muriel is older—and—and—more thoughtful."

"Ay, much too thoughtful to my mind, it seems as if she had the cares of the whole family on her young shoulders. And she's

for helping Lydia with her's into the bargain ; and small thanks she gets. But I'll put a stop to it."

"And what about Sara ? Muriel is teaching her. The child would miss her dreadfully."

"Teaching is she, and washing, and dressing, and amusing, I suppose. Well, she shall go where she shall be learning instead of teaching. Send Sara to school, and keep Anna at home if you want a helper besides the maids. Muriel plays general 'lackey' no longer here !"

And though Ellen D'Anyer sighed, and John D'Anyer's pride rebelled, Mrs. Bancroft's strong will and plain speaking carried the day. Muriel was but a leaf on the stream. Her opinion was not asked, her wishes were not consulted, her objections were over-ruled. Indeed, she ceased to object when her mother said, "Don't thwart your grandmother, she sees farther than we do, and it won't do to offend her. Your father looks to her for means to help him over the present crisis ; for between your uncles and aunts there is nothing to be got out of the D'Anyers. There are too many schemers around the old folk. So be a good lass and go quietly."

"Ah ! mother dear, that is always your maxim—'quietly.' It is not always easy to be quiet. But kiss me, mother, and I'll do my best to be quiet too."

And she kept her word, not for a day, but for a life. There were times when her spirit burned hot within her, when she chafed under wrong and injustice, but the fire never blazed forth, and was rarely shown to exist.

When Sarah Bancroft, and John D'Anyer, and Sam rode back from Chester Autumn Fair, Muriel was left behind, bound hard and fast by her indentures to Mrs. Hopley for the term of five years ; the remission of two years from the customary seven having been made a matter of extra premium. Mrs. Bancroft had gone in search of the Rev. Thomas Bancroft once more, hoping this time to induce a little better supervision of the girl ; and was disappointed to find that he had quitted Chester for a better living in Boltoa ; nevertheless, she left her in her old friend's charge with not a doubt of Mrs. Hopley's motherly care, and kissed the girl on leaving, with the fullest sense of having done her duty, and her best for Muriel. How far her judgment was right remains to be seen.

And let no one in these times be surprised that the child and grandchild of well-to-do manufacturers should be so apprenticed. There was no such gulf between the retail and the wholesale trader as society now sets up. Men (and women) of wealth

worked with their own hands amongst their own workpeople, and thought it only right to do so. There was no chance, no excuse for the men idling when the master was at work too ; and when hands, and eyes, and brains, and capital worked together, fortunes were made.

John D'Anyer was wont to boast that he had patrician blood in his veins, and it was the pride of ancestry, not of the manufacturer, which rebelled against his mother-in-law's proposition. But Chester was far away, Muriel might come back improved in appearance, or at all events more useful to those at home ; he had his own reasons for keeping terms with his decisive mother-in-law, and after some hesitation he assented.

It was customary at that time to keep the raw apprentice for a whole year running up the seams of gown skirts, and going errands. It was not until the last year of her probation that she was allowed to cut out and trim.

Mrs. Hopley had other views with respect to Miss D'Anyer ; views she had not thought necessary to set before Mrs. Bancroft.

When the latter was gone and all settled, Muriel was shown into an upstairs room, or rather garret, with whitewashed walls, where she and three other apprentices had to sleep. It contained two truckle beds, a small triangular washstand, and a tiny looking glass suspended from a nail in the window frame. There was no dressing table but the window ledge, no chairs,—the girls' boxes might do duty for seats.

"What a wretched place!" was Muriel's involuntary ejaculation to her conductress, a Miss Holmes, the daughter of the Northwich doctor, as Muriel afterwards discovered.

"Half of Mrs. Hopley's tribe of children are similarly accommodated across the landing ; so we apprentices can have no grounds for complaint ;" and a shrug of the shoulder gave significance to Miss Holmes's reply.

There was no wardrobe, no chest of drawers. Muriel's hair trunk was tightly packed. "Where can I put my clothes?" she asked.

Miss Holmes pointed to a row of pegs in use. "You can have a couple of those ; there is your trunk for the rest ; and I would advise you to lock it."

Muriel looked dismayed. "Why, this is worse than Miss Briscoe's."

Miss Holmes smiled. "Children are apt to be inquisitive, and to leave dirty finger marks ; that is all I meant. Are you ready?"

They went down to the workroom on the floor below. It had three windows, and overlooked the street. There was a large

deal table in the middle on which lay odds and ends of tabinet, taffeta, mode, damask, velvet, and various other materials; paper patterns, pincushions, piercers, pins, scissors, wax, thread papers, and cotton balls, in what seemed to Muriel's unaccustomed eyes dire confusion. Six or seven young persons were seated round it at work, and without looking up or pausing for an instant, eyed her askance as she entered.

"Miss D'Anyer, you can take that seat," said Mrs. Hopley, a plain little woman, in as plain a black gown, at the top of the table, pointing to an unoccupied rush-bottomed chair with a straight high back.

"There is a green camlet petticoat on which you can begin for practice. Miss Holmes, I will thank you to show Miss D'Anyer how I require the straight seams to be run together. She must not attempt the gores."

The camlet was hard and stiff, the needle long, the work new; she pricked her fingers, knotted her thread; at the end of the seam found the upper breadth two inches short. It was evidently puckered. She had to draw out the thread, and commence afresh. She managed better the next time. But she had fastened off her threads, had swerved from the straight line. Again the thread had to be withdrawn. The task she had thought so simple *did* require practice. The third time she was more successful.

So began Muriel's initiation into the art of mantua making. So began her five years' bond service.

Is there nothing to be learned in those five years of maidenhood but the mysteries of thread and needle, silk and scissors? Will no romance break in on the dull monotony of five years' stitchery?

Wait. Time does not open his budget beforehand.

For some time after this Muriel might have been seen installed at the great deal table in the long, low ceiled room, crossed by thick beams overhead, with the seam of a skirt pinned to a large, heavy lead pincushion before her; whilst Mrs. Hopley or her forewoman, sitting on a raised seat at one end, adjusted paper patterns on linen linings, folded or pierced boundary lines in the latter with a huge steel stiletto before cutting into shape, composedly measured off breadths of costly brocade, or taffeta, or levantine, as of small account, or gave materials and directions right and left to apprentices and workwomen for this sleeve or that bodice, this piping, that ruffle.

And we, looking back, might have watched her as the youngest apprentice, running errands indoors and out, cutting hanks of

thread and skeins of silk into lengths, and plaiting up or folding them in papers lengthwise for use, or going to and from the long bags suspended from nails in the walls to remove rags or paper patterns, or other odds and ends, or we might have heard the call from either end of the table, "Pins wanted! Miss D'Anyer, please to pick up the pins;" and have seen Muriel go on her knees beneath the table, with the pin tray in her hand, to pick up the multitudinous needles and pins with which the floor was strewn, rejecting such as were headless and useless, for pins at that period were apt to lose their loose round knobby heads, made of fine wire separately twisted round the pin like a Turkish turban.

Three months later Mrs. Hopley found it convenient to call in one of her own youngsters to pick up the pins, and to send another apprentice on the outdoor errands, which had previously been so beneficial to Muriel's health. It was only on the Sunday that she could breathe the fresh air, and then after church she would take one or other of the little Hopleys by the hand, for a stroll by the Dee, or across the river to Handbridge, sometimes in company with Lucinda Holmes, but she "did not care to have the children always at her heels; little pitchers had such long ears, and such long tongues into the bargain."

"Ah, but they have affectionate little hearts," replied Muriel, "and if our tongues do not wag too fast, we need not be afraid of theirs; so mother used to tell our maid Betty."

Nevertheless Miss Holmes preferred to take the air without the said "little pitchers."

Mrs. Hopley had found more profitable employment for Muriel, profitable, that is, for herself, which began with flowering, as it was called, a white satin waistcoat for Lord Grosvenor, with coloured silk in what is now designated crewel stitch.

Shortly before Muriel was placed with the Misses Briscoe, British muslin had been first manufactured. Previously, India had supplied us with muslin, soft, and fine, and filmy as a cobweb, the tax on which placed it quite out of common reach; but indeed, so had Indian calicoes been taxed, and it was not more than twenty years earlier that the first piece of English calico had been made.

She had gone to Mrs. Hopley when the new production was in the early flush of fashion; and when Paisley was sending forth muslins sprigged and spotted with cotton in the tambour frame.

Mrs. Hopley improved upon this for her exclusive patronesses of Chester and North Wales; and if we had looked into her showroom even some three years later we might have seen where

she had placed the Misses Briscoe's pupil at one of the windows with a tambour frame between herself and the light, on which was stretched a breadth of transparent white muslin. Through this the skilful worker sent her rapid little tambour needle (or hook) darting with the celerity of light, caught up the fine crewel worsted, and so conjured a wreath of glowing roses, or dainty lilies into being under her deft hand.

It was not a healthy occupation for a growing girl; there was no mention of it in her indentures, it formed no legitimate part of the business she was there to learn; yet there she was seated from six in the morning until dusk, with her back to her companions, and the breadth of the frame interposed between her and a glimpse of the traffic in the street far below. Nothing to see but the muslin and the tightly twisted crewels, unless perchance a gabled roof or two, and the sky; little or no conversation, no relaxation, except when the bell called all downstairs into the kitchen for meals.

Even these were hurried, for May was coming, and many were the robes, besides the one in Muriel's tambour frame, which must be finished and ready for the wearers before the race week.

And do not suppose that dusk put a stop to Muriel's work, though daylight lingers long to welcome the coming steps of May.

"I should think you would be too weary to begin to sew after all the hours you have been stuck at that frame," whispered her friend Miss Holmes to her, as she stretched herself upwards with the prolonged sigh of exhaustion, before taking her seat at the table to join together strips of satin on the bias into lengths for rouleaus, or soft piping.

"Yes, I am tired; but the work has to be done, and, after the tambour frame, sewing is rather a relief," she answered pleasantly, in the same low tone.

"Relief, do you call it? Well, you are a droll mortal. But, certainly, any change must be a relief after stooping so long. I wonder how you stand it day after day!"

"Why, Lucinda, I am rather glad to be free to stoop. At Miss Briscoe's we wore a stiff collar with a sharp point under our chins when we sat at our embroidery, lest we should stoop and spoil our figures. It is quite satisfactory not to have a smart prick every now and then;" and Muriel put down her sewing to thread her needle and snuff the candles.

"Well," answered the other, pausing for an instant in her amazement, "I never saw your equal for making the best of things! I wish I could. I get as savage at times as a wild Indian."

"And so should I, if it would do any good. I grow weary enough. But whenever I feel inclined to rebel, I think of the poor little factory children in Manchester, going barefooted to their work, through the frost, and the snow, and the rain, at four o'clock in the morning; and that stops my grumbling."

"Less chattering at the end of the table! It interrupts work;" and after the sound of Mrs. Hopley's business-like voice there was silence, unbroken save for the busy click of needles, the rustle of silk, the dropping of pins, or scissors, or of snuffers into a snuffer tray.

The first break was at eight o'clock, when the forewoman rose, laid her work in order for the morning, and with a simple "Good night," to Mrs. Hopley, departed to her own home, to be followed by the rest of the outdoor workers.

There was another break at nine, when Mrs. Hopley herself stepped downstairs to her hot supper, and sent upstairs a cup of milk and a piece of bread to refresh each weary worker before the servants went to their press-bed in the kitchen. It was *sent* to them, not to save weary limbs the stretch up and down the stairs, but to save the *interruption* of the journey to and fro; for in and out of seam or fold, rich brocade or filmy muslin, must go the pitiless needles until the stroke of midnight, in spite of aching heads or eyes, or sleepy yawning, when even the snuffing of the candles became a change from the monotony of stitchery.

"Oh dear! how glad I am to get to bed," said one of the girls on reaching their long attic. "I am almost too tired to undress;" and she threw herself across the bed as she was, and had to be roused from sleep when her bedfellow was undressed.

"I was afraid she was going to keep us at it all night again, the old screw!" observed Miss Holmes, with a yawn, as she hastily doffed her clothes, leaving them in a ring on the floor, and slipped into bed, crying, "Gracious! if that girl isn't down on her knees as usual!"

"Well!" she began again, when Muriel rose to her feet, "I wonder you are not too jaded to say your prayers. I forget mine when I'm sleepy."

"Ah!" said Muriel soberly, "I dare not do that. I should be afraid, if I forgot my prayers, God might forget me. And where should I find strength for my work then? I never felt more need for prayer. Good night."

The good night was spoken to closed ears, and very shortly Muriel was asleep also.

All the girls were looking forward with anticipation to the race week for rest and relaxation; but before that came a week when

even the forewoman and outdoor hands were constrained to work an hour later in the evenings—a week prefaced and ended with a Sunday which was *not* a Sabbath for the apprentices who had the misfortune to be of Mrs. Hopley's own household.

Did Mrs. Hopley remain in the workroom to sustain the weary girls by her presence as a fellow worker? Did she excuse by any sophistry this compulsory breach of the fourth commandment?

She just came into the workroom, appointed each her special task, to be completed on her return; and whilst the bells were ringing solemnly out, went calmly forth in a dress of black lute-string, in the rear of her troop of children, to Trinity Church, with Mr. Hopley, in a sober suit of brown, by her side.

Down went work as the street door was heard to close. There was a general rush to the windows.

"There she goes in her silk gown," cried one, named Matilda Parkes, "with a face as serene as if she hadn't the weight of so much as a hank of thread on her conscience."

"I don't think she has any conscience!" was the commentary of another, "or she couldn't for shame go to church and leave us slaving here for her profit."

"I wonder how the old hypocrite would feel if I were to march up the aisle in the middle of the sermon, and say, 'If you please, Mrs. Hopley, how am I to trim Lady Grosvenor's sleeve?'" said Miss Holmes, in a tone of sarcastic mimicry, winding up with the quick outburst, "I *hate* hypocrisy!"

"Hush!" interposed Muriel, who had not before spoken. "We are none of us justified in judging another. To her own Master she standeth or falleth. We have simply to do our own duty here. My old teacher, Miss Williams, impressed that very strongly on me one day when I was judging Miss Briscoe very harshly, in a spirit of rebellion against discipline."

"Ah! there's another of your *pious* folk! It's enough to make one sick of religion to see what a cloak is made of it!" jerked out Matilda Parkes, with her elbows out on the window sill.

"Nay," said Muriel, smiling, "we must not find fault with the cloak because of the rags it may chance to cover."

"Then, I suppose, you would have us think old hypocrites like Mrs. Hopley and the two Miss Briscoes pay religion a compliment by wearing it as a mantle?" put in Miss Holmes, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Muriel hesitated, and flushed. She had not altogether forgotten her painful experience at school, and every day made her

more sick and weary of her trammels in Watergate-street, and led her to question her grandmother's discernment, even if she made no open complaint. But young as she was, she had learned somehow, not to confound systems with individuals; and her charity was large. She answered slowly :

"I fear that hypocrites do bring religion into discredit ; but we have no right to say that either Miss Briscoe, or Miss Betty, or Mrs. Hopley are intentionally hypocrites. Miss Williams said——"

"Oh, there now," interrupted Miss Parkes, "we've had quite enough of Miss Williams and her preaching, and yours too! You'll want to make out that the Briscoe's and Hopley's are angels next!"

"I do think that Mrs. Hopley's customers are almost as much to blame as she is!" And Muriel's needle flew swiftly through the stitchery she had resumed.

"Of course she could neither decline the work, nor get more helpers? And the *excellent* mother *must* set an example to her chicks!"

A burst of approving laughter, very uncommon in that room, greeted Miss Holmes's ironical speech, of which Muriel took no open notice. But when Miss Holmes came back to her seat, and to the Grecian robe she was trimming, she leaned towards her and whispered :

"Don't be too hard on Mrs. Hopley. Think what her cares must be with all that family to rear, and so little help from her husband. She would offend her best customers if she refused work at the busy seasons. I dare say we are no worse off than other apprentices. Remember that Mary Clifford was beaten to death by her mistress. And if she did leave us at work whilst she took her children to church, it was better than keeping them all at home, or letting them go alone. Mind you, I don't approve of sewing on a Sunday any more than you do. I feel that I want rest, and should work all the better in the week if I had it; and I've an impression that what Mrs. Hopley gains by our work on the Sunday, she loses on the Monday, and is no richer for it at the year's end."

"That's very likely!" was all the reply from Miss Holmes this time. Muriel had sent her thoughts into a new channel; and when Mrs. Hopley came back, needles, not tongues, were at work.

Not until the Monday night was the last garment completed and sent home. On Tuesday there was a thorough clearing and turnout of the workroom and dormitories for whitewashing

and scrubbing. And then, when the girls were completely worn out with night and day work, there were four days for themselves.

Four days when they were allowed to go where they pleased, see whom they pleased, do what they pleased, without let or hindrance. The exemplary matron, the vigilant taskmistress, who indoors laid an embargo on free speech and locomotion, suffering the maidens in her charge to go forth without guardian or supervision amongst the indiscriminate throng drawn together by a great horse race. What would Mrs. Bancroft or the D'Anvers have thought had they known it?

Legislation has stepped in to protect the factory child and the milliner's assistant; but far into the present century girls were worked to death before their apprenticeships ran out,—that is, when there was a fashionable demand upon the establishment, and the head of it had no scruples. In the last century apprenticeship law was excessively stringent, and at all times there are those who will take advantage of all the law allows, and feel themselves justified. As I have elsewhere intimated, in our army, our navy, our public schools, our private households, discipline was the dominant power, and people had a notion that the world would not get on if the despot discipline was deposed. Feeling was blunted by common consent.

We, in this our day, looking back, ask could such things be? But then they *were*, and were too general to create surprise. But even then there were masters and masters, mistresses and mistresses, and Mrs. Bancroft had made a mistake, not in the system, but in regarding Mrs. Hopley as one of its mildest exponents.

Not the only mistake she had made.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DAY OF SURPRISES.

FORTUNATELY for girls so left to themselves, at Chester the Roodee, or racecourse, lies in a sweeping bend of the river immediately beneath its broad walls on the south-west, a sandy plateau once on a time covered with water at high tides, which

carried thither an ancient cross or "rood," now raised above the watery level and covered with coarse vegetation, its mile-round course overlooked by good houses built upon the ramparts, and by the Roman tower of the old castle, and had anyone impeached Mrs. Hopley's care for the young women committed to her charge she would most likely have pointed to the fashion and respectability of Chester congregated on those walls to witness the race, and have asked, "Where could they be more secure?"

And indeed there the best families of Chester might be found, for there they could promenade and see the show, yet not be of it.

Yet what guarantee had Mrs. Hopley that they, cooped up week after week in a close workroom, would keep to the comparatively safe walls, and not rush like unbroken colts under the Watergate to the Roodee itself, with all its excitement and gaiety and—danger?

Such might have been the case year by year had not Muriel shrunk from mingling with a promiscuous crowd, and refused to accompany Matilda Parkes and her set on the *first* occasion! They had urged that her "mother would not know," and she had answered, "God and my own conscience would;" and after some banter and ridicule as a "methodistical baby," and "a stuck-up miss," she was left to pursue her own path.

However, she was not left alone. Miss Holmes, the Northwich surgeon's daughter, her elder by a couple of years, struck by the arguments of a mere girl on the side of propriety, had left the others to their own devices, and borne Muriel company.

They were of different temperaments and training, but they were friends from that day forth, to which friendship an unexpected meeting with Dr. Holmes, and a party of Northwich friends, no little contributed.

Three years had done their work, and Muriel was now eighteen, tall and slender—too slender, in fact; for her slight, though symmetrical figure, suggested overgrowth and overwork, too much sitting up and too little nourishment; as did the flitting colour on her cheeks, from which the disfiguring red marks of disease had disappeared, leaving little besides a seam between the lower lip and chin to tell what its ravages must have been when her father could say her "beauty was spoiled for ever."

Beautiful she was not, but there was a something in her face better than beauty. She had a long straight nose, good teeth, an open forehead, a pleasant smile, a pair of large brown eyes,

clear and transparent as the well of truth, and her nut-brown hair had grown afresh sufficiently to curl all over her head, and be the very height of Parisian fashion, if it could no longer stray below her waist. What the style is called in these days of modern reproduction I know not. In those terrible days of French Revolution it was called a "Brutus." Any way, it suited Muriel, and so did the low-crowned straw hat she wore tied over her small ears with a sky-blue ribbon in a bow beneath her chin. She seemed to have a liking for the colour which harmonised so well with her complexion; for the small ruffles at the wrists of her tight sleeves were confined by narrow straps of the same hue, whilst an azure waistband also girdled her plain white muslin dress, as might be seen when her scarf tippet, also of muslin, and crossed modestly over the bodice, wafted aside.

The dress was plain and simple, without frill or fur-below, was not so tight as to impede locomotion, not so long as to sweep up the dust, nor so short as to exhibit more than the neat foot. But, simple as it was, both that and the corresponding dress of Miss Holmes had been weeks in preparation, since only an occasional quarter of an hour stolen from sleep had been given to them, and so much of the first day of their holiday as exhausted nature had not compelled them to spend on their pillows.

On the Thursday they were all up betimes. There was quite a scramble which should have prior use of the mean little looking-glass; but even the dressing of damsels for an unwonted holiday must come to an end, and then they stole one by one into the showroom to take a general survey in the large mirror before they sallied forth, their hearts in a flutter with the excitement of the actual, the probable, and the possible.

"You look a credit to the house," Mrs. Hopley condescended to say as they passed her on the stairs. "I hope your demeanour will be equally creditable," at which Miss Parkes gave her head a toss. Most likely she felt the reminder as a home thrust; but our story does not concern Matilda Parkes; it follows those who, as usual, separated from her and her companions at the Watergate.

"I'm glad to be well rid of them," said Lucinda Holmes, as she turned to the long flight of steps which led up to the Walls, whilst the others, less scrupulous, passed under the shadow of the wide arch on to the open Roodee, where the green turf bore traces of three days' trampling under foot. "Their manners are anything but decorous. I should be ashamed if anyone I knew

saw me with them. They have never been the same girls since they first went on that course."

"I'm sure I don't care to associate with them, either in the house or out, though there is little fear of meeting anyone I know," said Muriel. "Still I am very sorry they would not be advised. They are sure to regret their giddiness in the long run."

"Not meet anyone you know in all this crowd! Well, we shall see!"

They were by this time on the Walls above the Watergate. Looking back up the street they watched a well-known chariot with six horses coming down at a rattle, closely followed by a light curricule. By some unknown impulse Muriel hurried her companion across to the opposite side, and, standing with her hand to her chest—for a small matter took her breath—looked over the parapet, and saw not only Lady Grosvenor's chariot bowling through the broad arch on to the Roodee, with a troop of gentlemen on horseback in attendance on the beauty of the day, but the curricule likewise, and in it—she could not be mistaken—sat Mrs. Wynne, elegantly and youthfully attired in gauze and feathers, and, yes! it *was* Mr. Arthur Wynne there by his mother's side. She might have doubted, for six years had wrought a change in him as in herself; but the clustering curls had all been drawn back, pomatumed and powdered in regulation military style, so that the red scar on his temple was visible.

Her heart gave a great bound. Yet wherefore? Had not the Wynnes passed out of her life and her memory? Her hand went up instinctively to her neck, and closed upon the lady's locket. How should she forget with that memorial in wear? There was no doubt an eager smile upon her face.

He looked up; his glance took in the outlines of two nice girls in straw hats and muslin tippets. There was a temporary stoppage. He had an impression he had seen those large brown eyes somewhere before. The carriages rolled on again, the lady oblivious, her son perplexed by a glimpse of brown eyes, and Muriel feeling only—they were gone!

"Why, Miss D'Anyer, I declare if that piece of affectation is not the captain's wife who was so rude to Mrs. Hopley!"

"Eh!" said Muriel, only half roused from her reverie.

"Don't you know?—the lady who was so anxious to have a dress made by Lady Grosvenor's own milliner, and who, when her ladyship sent Mrs. Hopley to her, at the Blossoms, was so uncivil. I fancy I see her now!" explained Lucinda, and taking

Muriel's silence for an admission of forgetfulness ran on glibly, "You know I went with Mrs. Hopley that day to carry the measures and patterns, and bring the stuff back. Up went her ladyship's, or captainship's eyebrows with a well-bred stare. She eyed little Mrs. Hopley from the point of her toe to the tip of her black bonnet, and superciliously lisped out, '*You cannot be Mrs. Hopley; there must be some mistake.*' 'Yes, madam, I am Mrs. Hopley. There is no mistake. I understood from Lady Grosvenor that you desired me to make a dress.' 'You!' drawled out the lady, 'you! an antiquated frump like you could never make a dress for *me*?' 'Very well, madam. Good day!' and Mrs. Hopley walked out with as much dignity under her plain black bombazine as if she had been a duchess and not a dressmaker. I had much ado to keep my countenance. But wasn't Mrs. Hopley in a rage; you surely remember? And see, Muriel, the two carriages are drawing alongside one another, and I could fancy the captain's wife was telling Lady Grosvenor that Mrs. Hopley had declined to accept her humble apology when she found out *her* mistake. I wonder if she will tell her how Mrs. Hopley curtsied and said, 'Oh, no, madam, an antiquated frump like *me* could not make a dress for *you*!'"

"Who are you mimicking all this while?" asked Muriel, recalled to herself. "Not, surely, Mrs. Wynne!"

"Yes, that's the name—Mrs. Wynne!"

"Then perhaps you do not know she was the lady your father attended at Eddisbury, when her chaise upset!"

"You don't mean it! That wax doll! Why, if as the song says of her ladyship,—

‘She dyes her lips with the rose’s hue,
And paints her veins with azure blue,’

I am sure it might be said of Mrs. Wynne. I never saw such a piece of——"

"Stop, Lucinda! You must not say that of Mrs. Wynne. I never saw her paint, and she was very polite to me."

"And if *that's* the lady, she had reason to be polite to you, I've heard father say. But come along, and let's see who are on the Walls before the races begin."

Muriel was not voluble; Miss Holmes was. Scarcely an individual passed in that saunter amidst the gay and fashionable throng whom she did not check off with some droll comment on costume or characteristics.

Muriel was silent, glad all at once that Mr. Arthur Wynne had escaped her companion's observation, and to be spared the effort

of conversation. Why, she could scarcely have told ; but the sight of that curricule and its occupants had thrown her back into the past,—to associations at once pleasant and painful. She was never one to over-rate her own services. Now, she felt that no chance service of her grandmother or herself could bridge the gulf between the Manchester traders and the associates of Lady Grosvenor. Yet common sense would be heard, and it said that if those people owed their lives to her grandmother, they would be ungrateful to forget it, whatsoever their rank. And she could not think Mr. Arthur ungrateful. Oh, how she wished Miss Briscoe had allowed her to see the captain when he called !

As if conjured up by the thought, they came abruptly upon the two prim sisters, as stately as of old, although the elder now rested for support on a crutched stick, and there was an air of slightly faded gentility about their well-worn brocades.

Muriel would fain have questioned them respecting Captain Wynne, but her awe of the grand preceptresses had not died out ; she answered their formal salutation with a profound obeisance, as of old, and the opportunity was lost, as they passed on.

A race was being won or lost ; horses flashed past with the rapidity of lightning, urged on by whip and spur, and the cries of an excited throng ; but Muriel's eyes seemed drawn by some strange fascination to a group of carriages, as if to single out one figure of the many standing up and cheering the winner.

There was something in Muriel's breast that was neither hope nor expectation, and yet was vaguely akin to both, with a dash of doubt thrown in. Should she ever meet the young officer face to face again ? His rank was to her unknown.

They had turned again to promenade, and not more brightly did the sun flash in the winding river, than the light which shone in Muriel's countenance as she encountered—not a gay young officer—but Mrs. Parry, from the Wrexham farm.

By this time, Muriel had picked up sufficient Welsh, and Mrs. Parry had so far improved her English, as to need no translator. The former was soon in possession of the intelligence that Captain Griffiths and her niece were then in Portsmouth, that he was about to join his ship, and that when he had sailed, Mrs. Griffiths and her two children would come to stay with her on the farm in his absence.

"Ant you had pest comes, too, my tear. It will do you goot, look you ! You pe too like the lily and the willow ; you want the fresh air ant the fresh milk, look you, to make you pe strong."

Then the hospitable Welshwoman shook hands, and they parted, not, however, before she had put Mrs. Parry in possession of the fact of her apprenticeship to Mrs. Hopley, and been in turn informed,—

“Your fine friends are again staying with Sir Matoc at the Plas, look you!” information which accounted for their presence on the racecourse.

With this meeting the mercury in Muriel’s barometer had gone up.

How she rejoiced in the prospect of seeing her gentle friend once again!—the one who had added sympathy to precept, and taught her, as her own mother had taught, that which the Misses Briscoe did not see was needed: forbearance and endurance.

It was indeed a day of surprises; that day on which Muriel did not expect to meet anyone.

Towards the middle of the afternoon, a voice hailed them from the Roodee. It was Dr. Holmes; his suit of professional black almost as rusty with wear as with the dust of the road. There was a walk back towards the Watergate, and then he took possession of them.

Almost his first salutation was a remark that they had “no more colour than their dresses,” and a demand to know “what have you both been doing to look so limp and wishy-washy?”

“Doing? Working night and day, with hardly time to know if the food we ate was good or bad, and not too much of it.”

He shook his head; “that’s bad, very bad,” then after a pause—

“I suppose it would be no use remonstrating with Mrs. Hopley?”

“Not a bit. She would only tell you as she tells us when we grumble, that ‘we do not know when we are well off, and there are other mistresses who beat their apprentices black and blue.’ She talks of Mrs. Brownrigg, of Fetter Lane, London, who threw pails of water on her apprentices when they swooned after correction, and beat one girl to death, but she never adds that Mrs. Brownrigg was hanged for it, not she! She ‘cannot see what we have to complain of,’ and,” added the mimic, “I suppose we must grin and abide.”

“Ah, well, Lucinda, *your* time is nearly up. There you have the advantage of your friend here.”

“She has one advantage I have not. She is patient—I rebel.”

Something in this must have struck Mr. Holmes. Turning at a tangent, he said abruptly,—

"I have seen some old acquaintances of yours, Miss D'Anyer. Old patients of mine, too. But I am sorry to observe the lady suffers from a more terrible affliction than I have power to heal—loss of sight and memory."

Muriel was puzzled. The surgeon's tone was doleful; the twinkling of his optics unobserved. *She* had noticed nothing wrong with Mrs. Wynne's eyes; still, hers had been a distant and passing view.

"Blind?" she exclaimed, incredulously.

His daughter broke into a merry laugh, as he answered with gravity,—

"Well, not totally blind, my dear, but unable to distinguish any object so small as a country doctor." (A look of pain and disappointment crossed Muriel's face.) "Ah, I see you know the lady. What a contrast to her noble son! *His* memory needed no jogging. I should not have recognised him, he is grown so fine a man. It was he who spoke to me—put out his hand and shook mine as heartily as if we had been old chums, and pointed to the scar above his temple to quicken my memory. Then he asked if I had ever seen Red Riding Hood since she rode away on a pillion from the Forest House; and if you had not been a child at that time, I should have thought you rode off with a bit of his heart, Miss D'Anyer, I should indeed."

Muriel now laughed merrily, but she blushed at the same time.

"Not much fear of that, doctor."

"Well, you should know best. But I can assure you the message he sent when I said I hoped to find you with my daughter looked marvellously like it."

"Message!" echoed Muriel and Miss Holmes together.

"Yes, he begged me to convey to Miss D'Anyer his 'regret that his inadvertence had caused unpleasantness between herself and the old Griffins who unfortunately had charge of her.' He really called them Griffins, my young lady, and he also desired me to add that he was extremely sorry he should have been ordered away, without any opportunity being allowed either to the captain or himself for apology or explanation. And he 'hoped the *little girl* would not think him ungrateful.'"

"Little girl, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Holmes. "He should see you now."

"I was a little girl then, you know."

"I suppose he forgets that little girls grow," and Lucinda laughed heartily at her own supposition.

What thought the fine young officer who came up to them whilst the last race was being run, as the red chased the white

from Muriel's animated face at his hearty recognition, and the problem of the brown eyes, which had haunted him all day, was solved ?

He held Muriel's hand in his clasp as he said with honest warmth not unmingled with gratified surprise, "Can you forgive me, Miss D'Anyer, for failing to recognise you at a glance ? A pair of soft brown eyes seen above the Watergate as we drove from under it have been reproaching my memory all the day. I trust you will not reproach me for my failure to identify little Red Riding Hood with the tall sylphide, whose eyes were alone unchanged. Dr. Holmes will have told you that I had expected time to stand still with you."

Rosy enough was Muriel as she answered : "It is six years since you saw me, sir, but I do not think I am much changed—except that I am taller—and older."

"Not changed ! by——" the hasty and expressive ejaculation was arrested by Dr. Holmes, who, taking a hint from his daughter, introduced Lieutenant Wynne to her ; and with her, to lively chit-chat in which Muriel bore her part with smiling satisfaction. He, however, made an opportunity to enquire after her grandmother and uncle, and the hospitable Kingsleys, before they were otherwise interrupted.

The race was over, the crowd dispersing. There was quarrelling and fighting, laughter and shouting on the course ; horsemen and carriages were quitting the scene.

A young lady and an elderly gentleman were seated in the curriole with Mrs. Wynne, and the latter looked for her son, as if unwilling to drive away without him.

It was with no small chagrin that she discovered him in animated conversation with the country doctor and "two creatures in white muslin" on the walls close to the Watergate, the wide arch of which the vehicle was slowly approaching.

A servant, despatched with the message, "Mrs. Wynne is waiting, sir," bore back the answer, "I am at Mrs. Wynne's service ;" but he did not hear the young lieutenant express his hope that he should see Miss D'Anyer again before he left the neighbourhood, or observe the mutual looks of regret as he took leave.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SCENE IN A THEATRE.

DR. HOLMES had put up his horse and secured accommodation for himself at the Falcon Inn, in Bridge-street, another of the quaint old-timbered buildings common enough then, but now regarded by the antiquary and historian as relics of the past ; by the utilitarian and sanitarian as decaying rubbish, cumbering the ground. It was in good preservation, and notwithstanding the many inns in the city, was full to overflowing, when the doctor led his daughter and Muriel thither, and ordered tea with a good substantial joint to cut at, and a tankard of ale in addition, for himself.

"Eat away, my lasses," said he, "there's neither griffin nor dragon here to stint you, and the Falcon's a good provider ;" and he rubbed his podgy hands together with glee on finding how well they obeyed him. And no wonder they found appetites, seeing that a cake or two, bought from an itinerant vendor, had served for their noontide meal, and that their early breakfast was neither too plentiful nor sumptuous.

Whilst knives and forks did their duty, tongues were not silent ; father and daughter had naturally much to ask and answer. Amongst other matters came the question from Lucinda Holmes—

"Is Asa Booth with you still ?"

"Yes ; or I could not be sitting here so comfortably. He's been with me so long, the country patients take to him as naturally as ducks to the water ; and I've no desperate cases on hand. Ah ! he's a fine fellow is Asa ; cool and steady—feels a pulse or looks at a tongue with the gravity of an old physician. There's more than one farmer's daughter with a mind for Asa ; but he says 'he's no mind for them.'"

"I should think not, indeed," and Lucinda gave a scornful toss, "unless he meant to turn cow doctor."

"Ay, or set up an opposition to Maggy Blackburn there in the Forest," and the suggestion appeared to tickle the doctor, he laughed so heartily at his own sally. Even Lucinda seemed amused.

Muriel's curiosity was excited. "Who is Maggy Blackburn ?" she asked, turning to the doctor with some interest.

Doctor Holmes had a merry eye, and it twinkled knowingly.

"Who is she ? Wasn't at her birth and can't say—*what* she is would puzzle the black gentleman with a tail to tell. It is more

than forty years since she set up in the Forest as nurse and doctress; for I was but a little fellow at the time,—and sure she has a knowledge of herbs and simples—ay, and of herbs that are not *simples*—that many an apothecary has not. And she has known how to turn her skill to account. It is not only ignorant country folk that she doctors. *They* say she is a witch and are half afraid of her; but many a postchaise, and many a coronetted coach has driven through the Forest to Maggie Blackburn's door; and it is said that more has been done under her roof than has ever seen daylight. Maybe, there's no knowing, those bad lads of hers have helped to make an evil name for her, poachers are never in good odour with foresters. Anyhow, there are queer tales afloat, and"—here he tapped the table with the blade of his horn-handled knife, meditatively, dropping his voice to be unheard beyond the range of their own table—"a coach and six came on a mysterious errand to the Forest House in mistake for Maggy Blackburn's one night, and let the Kingsleys into the secret of Maggy's doings. But there," and he pushed his plate away, "these tales are not for young lasses."

Muriel had listened, breathless.

"Surely Uncle Sam and Aunt Lydia could not know of any wickedness, or they would never have had her in their house. I saw her tending aunt; and she brought a boy with her they called Jem. One of my uncles seemed curious about him. Do you know who *he* is?" she asked.

Dr. Holmes began to fill a long clay pipe, and the tobacco apparently required much manipulation, he did it so deliberately.

"We-ll," said he, slowly, as he lit his pipe at a wax taper set on the mantelpiece for such service, "I may have my suspicions, but no one cares to meddle with Maggie Blackburn's business. Maggie nursed Lydia's mother, and laid her out when she died, and perhaps that's why your aunt takes to her. But now, dears," and, shirking her question anent the boy, he pulled a bellrope suspended in the middle of the room, with a brass acorn for weight and handle, "Mrs. Adams or the chambermaid will show you to a room where you may tittivate yourselves a bit, for I mean to take you to the play."

"The play!"

The exclamation was simultaneous, and both black eyes and brown lighted up at the word, but the intonation was different. Lucinda had been to the theatre with her father once or twice, and had visited the shows on the Justing-field at fair times with the other girls, and had witnessed the performance of a party of strolling players in a barn, before she left Northwich. Muriel

had only the remembrance of a pantomime seen in her childhood, but she had heard her father and relations talk of tragedies and comedies, and had early made acquaintance with Shakspeare in Theobald's edition from her father's bookshelves, until she had a strong desire to see an acted play. But there had also been the counter influence of her three years with the Misses Briscoe, to whom the theatre was but a single remove from the bottomless pit—the Chester playhouse essentially so. Mrs. Hopley too had strong views on the subject.

Muriel's quick "Oh, thank you!" was followed by—"Do you think it would be right for us to go, sir? Mrs. Hopley——"

"Bother Mrs. Hopley! Let her say what she likes," cried audacious Lucinda.

Her father smiled; between the whiffs of his pipe he said, "I'll make it all right with the old lady, don't let that trouble you;" and Muriel, not confident enough to make a fuller explanation before strangers, followed Lucinda and their conductress to a stuffy chamber, though, it must be confessed, somewhat dubiously.

The history of the Chester Theatre had something to do with this, for though Muriel was not puritanic, she had the fullest reverence for sacred things.

It so happened that its site was not propitious. The ancient church of St. Nicholas had at one time been transferred to St. Oswald, but either the saints disagreed, or their representatives, and the sacred fane was deserted for more than half a century. It was then converted to secular uses as the Common Hall of the city, and St. Nicholas being the lawyers' patron saint, there might be some *pretence* of fitness, but that it should afterwards degenerate into a mart for wool—a Wool Hall, and finally become a playhouse, and a licensed Theatre Royal, was not so fit.

These changes had been wrought in the course of centuries, and few who entered the obscure building under the shadow of the Cathedral, ever thought of its original use.

Mr. Holmes did not. He led the two white-robed damsels past the great doors of a waggoner's warehouse on the ground floor, and up the staircase to the hall above, without troubling himself about the ancient uses of the edifice. He had taken places for the pit, and was more concerned in finding good seats for his companions than in aught else.

Not so Muriel. Miss Briscoe had so impressed on her young mind, in her pompous orations, that all who entered the desecrated building were doomed to perdition, that she could not

shake off a feeling of uneasiness ; and after a time ventured to entrust Mr. Holmes with her doubts and apprehensions.

"My good Miss D'Anyer," said he, "don't perplex your young brain with questions so abstruse. The monks of St. Werburgh were not so scrupulous when they turned the building over to the citizens for common uses ; and after centuries of legal wrangling, and of mercantile chaffering, there can be little of holiness or sanctity left to the old walls. Besides, the stage has been a great teacher ; it has its own code of morals ; and its sermons are not to be despised. I always treat myself to the play whenever I can afford a holiday, though that is not often, and I take the place as I find it, without a thought what it has been. Besides, did not the monks have mystery plays on this very spot ? Listen to the music, child, and make your mind easy."

She took his advice, listened to the music, and glanced at the seats right and left called the boxes, though they bore little resemblance to the curtained boxes of modern theatres, and soon became interested in her surroundings, albeit not wholly convinced by the doctor's arguments. The seats were gradually filling, but one box near the stage remained unoccupied.

There was a tolerable orchestra, and the music soon carried her out of herself. A countryman, dressed in his best Sunday smock, sat on her right, companioned by a respectably-attired young woman whose rusticity seemed to have long worn off. To this man everything appeared strange, but he evidently had an ear for the music, and made his comments audibly, regardless of his companion's frequent "nudges" and hints to "be quiet, Zack, do ?"

"Eh, that's foine !" cried he ; "that's grand ! It's worth a' the brass to yer that, by gum ! It's better nor th' music i' Gresford Church ! Oi sings i' th' quire i' Gresford Church, Miss," he vouchsafed, addressing Muriel complacently.

"Do you ?" said Muriel briefly.

"Yoi," he answered, when further communication was cut off by the ringing of the prompter's bell, and the rise of the green curtain.

The play was "The Jealous Wife." As the curtain rose, "Mr. and Mrs. Oakley" entered wrangling, and came forward to the footlights with a letter under excited discussion. Barely had a sentence been uttered when the countryman rose to his feet, gave a pluck at his companion's sleeve and cried, "Coom, lass, it's toime to goo ; dunno thee see they're talking business ; it isna mannerly to stop an' hearken."

"Do sit still, Zack; that's part of the play," whispered the young woman, pulling him down to his seat. "Don't ye see all the other folk sit still."

He looked round, scratched his shock red head, and resumed his seat as bidden, looking on and listening with open mouth; but preserving tolerable silence. At the end of the first act he again rose to go, and was again called to order. His pockets were apparently filled with nuts, the remnants of some winter store, for he amused himself between the acts with cracking them betwixt his teeth. All at once, as if inclined to be extra civil and generous, he offered a handful of the nuts to Muriel, and when she quietly declined, he became pressing.

"Yea, do, Miss, fur they're so hard oi conna crack 'em!"

Again there was a pull at the man's sleeve.

"Hush, Zack, behave yoursel'. Don't you see you're annoying Miss." Then speaking across him to Muriel, "Please, Miss, I hope as you'll excuse Zack. He's my cousin, but he's never been to a play before."

The fellow stammered out something about not meaning to offend; Muriel, half inclined to laugh, bent her head in assent to the apologist, and after this "Zack" subsided, much to the comfort of Muriel, who had seen a party enter the unoccupied "box," in which she recognised, besides Mrs. Wynne and her son, the young lady and old gentleman whom she had seen in the curricule on the Roodiee.

Mr. Holmes and Lucinda observed the new arrivals also, as who did not, for their entrance disturbed "the house;" but the trio in the pit remained unrecognised, even when Mrs. Wynne put her gold eyeglass up to scan the opposite boxes, passing over the pit with a glance too cursory to take in more than its general aspect, as if its occupants could be of no account to her, and were beneath notice.

Their arrival certainly distracted Muriel's attention no little. She found herself wondering who the young lady sitting next to Arthur Wynne could be. She was not long left in doubt. Between the acts, Lucinda, who had given them all a good stare, leaned across her father and whispered:—

"I say, Muriel, that's Sir Madoc Wynne and his daughter, and that other young fellow at the back is Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson. He's been abroad on the grand tour (she pronounced it tower), and only came back last year when his father, old Sir Jenkyn, died. Matilda Parkes (the gossip of the workroom) says he's over head and ears in love with Miss Wynne, and follows her like her shadow; though everyone knows she's as good as promised to her cousin.

It's a fine thing for her to have two strings to her bow, and never a beau at all for either you or me, except my old father here."

"That's just what Asa wanted to know the other day, whether Miss Lucinda had a beau. I shall be able to answer him now," said Mr. Holmes slyly.

"I don't care if you do," replied Lucinda, with a toss of the head; and just then the curtain rose again.

"So that is Sir Madoc of the Plas," thought Muriel; he's a fine, hearty old gentleman, though he does take so much snuff. And how his snuffbox sparkles, it might be all diamonds. I like him better than his daughter; there is something scornful and imperious about her. I should not think she would suit Mr. Arthur, though she is so handsome; and that gold-llama dress does set her off wonderfully, though it is far too low in the neck, and the sleeves are much too short, to my mind. That thin gauze scarf is no covering for her bare neck. I wonder if those beads and bracelets are topazes or amber? I should have thought Mrs. Wynne would have told her to cover herself, but she does not seem much better. Well, I know it's the fashion; but my mother would never expose herself for fashion, I'm certain. I should think Captain Wynne would not like it, or Mr. Arthur either. How she looks up at him, and what large black eyes she has! What, I wonder, is she whispering to him behind her fan? Dear me! What business is it of mine?"

Still her eyes and fancies would stray to the box on their left, in spite of her interest in the performance, or her attempts to convince herself that its occupants, their dress or their doings, could be no affair of hers.

The curtain fell on the *dénouement* of the "Jealous Wife;" and in a few minutes rose on a forest scene and a comic singer. But ere the singer could utter a note, up started the countryman from his seat by Muriel's side, pointed towards the scene, and in a tone of unqualified amazement, heard all over the house, exclaimed:—

"Whoi! if theer isna' Gresford Wood! How did they get Gresford Wood theer? Whoi, Miss," and he addressed himself to Muriel once more, thus calling general attention to her; "Whoi, Miss, oi goo through yon wood every Sunday to church, oi do!"

"Sit down, will you, Zack, I tell you! It's only painted;" and his better informed cousin pulled him forcibly down.

"Painted! Is it? By gum! I thought it wur the wood itself," he exclaimed, still in bewilderment.

Rare tribute that to the scene painter.

It was anything but pleasant to Muriel, whose innate delicacy shrank from general observation; to say nothing of the drop of her father's family pride lurking in her blood. Her gipsy hat failed to conceal the crimson flush of annoyance on her brow, when Lieutenant Wynne, recognising her presence, bowed to her and her friends from the box.

It was meant as courtesy, but it only served to make her more conspicuous and uncomfortable. She saw a scornful gleam in the questioning black eyes of Sir Madoc's daughter, and could almost imagine her speech to Mrs. Wynne was, "Who are those queer people in the pit?"

Muriel heard little or nothing of the song which seemed to delight Mr. Holmes so mightily with its chorus of "Fol-de-rol, too-ra-loo," and which he applauded to the echo. All she could think was, how to get away before the country fellow at her elbow again made her a mark for all eyes, and claimed association with her, in the sight of everybody. Who everybody was she did not stop to think.

No sooner was the song over than she suggested, nay urged upon the good doctor that Mrs. Hopley would be angry if they stayed for the farce. They "were never out so late without leave," she added; and though Lucinda said "Bother!" and was inclined to brave Mrs. Hopley's displeasure, her father took Muriel's view of the subject, and rose to lead them forth.

There was a movement in the side box. As they reached the head of the stairs, they were joined by the lieutenant.

"I am afraid that country bumpkin has driven your fair charge away," said he, addressing the doctor, adding: "If you will conduct your daughter down this awkward staircase, I will take care of Miss D'Anyer," bowing gracefully and taking her hand as he spoke. A word or two he said about the play—was sorry she had been annoyed—hoped she had been entertained, and that they might shortly meet again—to all of which she answered in a sort of bewildered dream, and in little more than monosyllables—and then he shook hands and returned to his party—to find his seat occupied by Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson, Miss Wynne occupied with Sir Jenkyn, Sir Madoc taking a long-drawn pinch of snuff, and Mrs. Wynne fanning herself irritably.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. WYNNE'S MISTAKE.

COULD that be the same Muriel who went back at night to the crowded attic, as the one who had left it in the morning with the weariness of weeks in her gait and bearing? Her tranquil, patient eyes had a new light. Her doubts had been resolved. Arthur Wynne was neither haughty nor ungrateful, whatever his patrician mother might be; and she would fain think Mr. Holmes and Lucinda both in error respecting her, though her faith was certainly shaken. The fresh air, the exercise, the gay scene, the excellent repast provided by the good surgeon, had all tended to refresh weary body and spirit; but more than all the pleasant surprises of the day, the meeting with Mrs. Parry and Mr. Arthur Wynne had served to cheer and brighten her.

It was not much the latter had said, but quite enough to show that she was remembered gratefully, though as a child, and that his surprise at finding her a woman was not an unpleasant one. Moreover, his inquiries had embraced her grandmother, and uncle, and the Kingsleys. It was clear *he* did not seek to ignore them all. And nothing proved it so much as his open recognition in the theatre when surrounded by his own friends.

From the importance she attached to the discovery, it would seem as if there had been a doubt lingering in her mind and troubling her. But in monotonous, uneventful lives, small matters do assume undue importance. Not that the retention or loss of a friend is a small matter by any means. At all events, she was blythe now the doubt was resolved.

Mr. Holmes called early in the morning. He had an interview with Mrs. Hopley, during which the little mantua maker took lofty ground. She dwelt on the self-will and discontent and indolence of the young women, to whom she 'considered she had been almost a mother, training them, as she said, for future lives of industry and usefulness, by judicious discipline. Nothing was to be done without discipline in an establishment like hers. She was bound to keep insubordination down, and it was a difficult matter with two girls like Matilda Parkes and Lucinda Holmes under her roof ready at all times to incite others to rebellion. The best she could say for his daughter was that she had selected a good companion. She had certainly improved since Miss D'Anyer came, but that was not saying much, there was room for it; and if Miss D'Anyer had taken to grumbling she was of opinion that companionship with Miss Holmes had not improved *her*.

This was not a pleasant hearing for a father who had to take another's word for his daughter's conduct, and who knew of old that she had something of a spirit. It stirred the easy man to say, "Miss D'Anyer did not grumble; but a doctor can read faces and appearances, and their faces spoke loudly enough. They spoke of too much work, and too little sleep, food, and fresh air. I should prescribe all three, Madam. At all events, Lucinda's insubordination will not trouble you long, thank God!"

And he walked away quite in a fluster, leaving Mrs. Hopley to recover her composure at leisure.

He was, however, afraid he had not much mended matters by his interference, and was glad to get the two girls out of the house to share a substantial breakfast with him at his inn, before he started for Northwich.

That he ought to be on the road betimes he knew; for though Asa Booth, his young assistant, had come into his surgery when a boy as a pupil, and he could leave ordinary patients to his care, there were cases not to be so left, and he was anxious to get back; but for some unexplained reason he lingered, even after he had borne them company to the rapidly filling Walls, and declared he could not stay.

"I am sorry I must leave you both," he said, as at length he was going; "not that any harm is likely to come to you, if you go home before the last race. When the young bucks, who have been drinking over their losings and winnings, leave the Roodee, your safest place is the house, since you have no protector. And, my dears, should Lieutenant Wynne seek you out, and join your promenade—though I have great respect for the gentleman—endeavour to shorten your walk. There is so wide a gap between the mantua-maker's workroom and the Wynnes' carriage, that—that—well—a girl who respects herself will not care to be seen with the red-coats, when there are no old folk on guard. Mind, I have not a word to say against Lieutenant Wynne—but—it's best to be on the safe side. So now, good-bye, Miss D'Anyer, good-bye, Lucinda! Be good lasses; and take care of yourselves. I'll come or send for you when your time's up, Lu."

The surgeon had no doubt seen in Arthur Wynne's face that his expressed desire to meet Miss D'Anyer again was something more than mere compliment, and his word of advice was kindly meant. Muriel had won his approbation as a child; and he could not forget that now she was the associate of his daughter. That she was a good one he had Mrs. Hopley's grudging testimony; still the little woman's remarks had made him uncomfortable. And he shared the common belief that red-coats and rakes were

synonymous. He rode home on a somewhat uneasy saddle in consequence. He could but remember that he had himself brought Lucinda into contact with the officer; aye, and her friend too; for the lieutenant would not himself have recognised Muriel, changed as she was.

Miss Holmes remembered it also.

"Dear me, what a fuss father makes, to be sure!" she exclaimed as he went away. "If a mere red coat makes a man more dangerous than a black or a blue one, why did he bring the lieutenant to us?"

"That puzzles me," responded Muriel, as they strolled along in the direction of the Dee, past the Nun's Garden, and the Castle, meeting at every few yards familiar city faces, lay and cleric. "Perhaps the lieutenant asked him. You see, he knew me long ago, before I went to Miss Briscoe's, and I don't think he expected to find me grown up, or has any idea that I am an apprentice."

She paused, and, as if on reflection, added:—

"Two of my cousins are military officers, one in the artillery, and I come of a good family; but, for all that, I fancy your father is quite right. And I know that, in any case, young and unprotected girls like ourselves cannot be too careful. Still——"

She broke off; the doctor's caution had set her thoughts wandering in new tracks, but the sun was in eclipse over all. Not until now had she confessed to herself that she looked forward eagerly to the pleasure of another meeting with Arthur Wynne. Not until now had she seen that pleasure and propriety were in antagonism.

"Still *what*?" her companion asked, after a longer pause.

Muriel's straying thoughts were recalled.

"Still—oh, I meant that we might be discreet without being discourteous, should we chance to meet Lieutenant Wynne; but—a—I don't think the likelihood very great."

"Don't you?" droned out Lucinda in a tone of incredulity.

Just then their attention was drawn to the animated scene on the racecourse below, where the horses were being recalled after a false start, and no more was said on that subject.

Presently Lucinda's sharp eyes descried Mrs. Wynne's pony carriage; and she pointed out—unnecessarily—that the same young lady and elderly gentleman bore Mrs. Wynne company, and that the gallant officer and Sir Jenkyn were again in attendance on horseback.

Muriel drew back.

"Come away, Lucinda; don't let them see us staring at them."

But the race was being run, and Lucinda was not inclined to budge ; and soon, whether Muriel looked towards them or not, a cheese-cutter hat was doffed in respectful salutation, to which a touch on Muriel's elbow called attention.

About half an hour later, when they had changed their position, and Muriel, weary of the shifting crowd, the cries, and the commotion, was persuading her companion to quit the scene and make the circuit of the city walls for a quiet change, a brisk, firm step behind them stopped short, and in another minute Arthur Wynne was shaking hands with them. Not the slender youth with the pale face Muriel had first seen in the forest, but a fine, manly fellow nearly six feet high, with a noble forehead from which the hair, white with powder, was drawn back, thus exposing the long-healed scar. His dark grey eyes were set in well-moulded features, the nose being large without undue prominence, the lips at once tender and firm. "How closely he resembles his handsome father !" was the swift thought of Muriel, as with a smile he began :

"It is quite a pleasure to meet you again. I was afraid Mr. Holmes might have spirited you off with him to Eddisbury or to Northwich this morning. I was summoned away yesterday so abruptly, before I had well recovered my astonishment at the transformation of Little Red Riding Hood, and my speech with you at the theatre was so brief, that I had not the presence of mind to ask if your visit to Chester would be prolonged through the race week."

This was not put as a question, yet Muriel felt it to be one, and perceived that he supposed her only a visitor ; and whether she was moved by the caution of Mr. Holmes, or by a touch of her father's pride, she answered merely, "I am living in Chester at present, sir."

He was "delighted to hear it—thought it was probable they might meet again before he rejoined his regiment. He and Mrs. Wynne were staying with relatives in the neighbourhood of Wrexham, and were frequently in the city. They were on their way to visit the same relations when they had the good fortune to fall in with Red Riding Hood and her friends, during Captain Wynne's sick leave," he said.

Yet he did not seem to be the bearer of any message from his mother, and did not offer to take Muriel to speak to the lady, although the carriage was in sight and easily accessible ; nor did Mrs. Wynne bow or even seem to recognise her, as she must surely have done had she known with whom her son had been conversing the previous afternoon, or had joined in the theatre—or at least so the simple-minded young person thought.

The fact was, there had been something narrowly approaching an altercation between the lady and her son overnight respecting that very young person. He had so openly expressed his gratification at a meeting which gave an opportunity of explaining apparent disrespect, and his surprise at the change years had effected in Miss D'Anyer, that Mrs. Wynne's most active instincts were aroused, and she once more declared :

"The slight obligation we were under to those people years ago does not justify the renewal of a casual acquaintance. They had no doubt forgotten us, and there is no reason we should refresh their memories."

"My father did not regard the obligation as slight; and I know *he* would be proud to show respect to Miss D'Anyer were he here."

"Oh, I do not question his Quixotism for a moment, but I cannot sanction hangers-on of that class; and I think, Arthur, that you might see its inconvenience, especially now we are staying at the Plas, and the furrier's grandchild has grown to womanhood. How you could bow to her and the country apothecary she was with, and quit our box to join such people, is positively astounding. It was exceedingly imprudent. I saw Pauline did not like it."

"Hang Pauline!" or something even stronger had almost escaped him. A quick compression of teeth and lips alone kept the ejaculation inaudible. He was sufficiently emphatic when he added deliberately: "I am not in leading strings to my cousin *yet*, and am not inclined to shape my course by Pauline's fancies. She does not appear to be shaping her course by mine. To my mind, choice lies between right and wrong, civility and incivility, gratitude and ingratitude. The age or class of Miss D'Anyer has nothing to do with it. Were she a barefooted beggar girl, her claim on my courtesy would be the same."

This conversation took place in Mrs. Wynne's private apartment at the Plas, a fine castellated stone mansion, the picturesque mountain seat of Sir Madoc Wynne, where a large party of guests had been drawn together by the Chester races, the ten or twelve intervening miles of rough road being of small account to the hard riders of those days, or to the native ponies harnessed to Sir Madoc's carriage, itself built to suit the roads, which certainly rendered running footmen with torches a necessity after nightfall, and not superfluities of ostentation; indeed, Sir Madoc was too hearty and genial for the latter.

Making much of her exhaustion and fatigue after the excitement of the play, and the perilous drive home through the

midnight air, Mrs. Wynne had expressed her intention to retire immediately, and required the assistance of her son to enable her to surmount the stairs to her rooms. And to this no one seemed to object, not even Pauline.

Mrs. Wynne herself, with all her langour and delicacy, had a little match-making on hand, it being her special desire to secure Sir Madoc's daughter and heiress for her son. Sir Madoc and Captain Wynne were next-of-kin; the wide estates of the baronet held stone for the quarrying above the surface, coal for the hewing beneath it; but little besides the Plas itself would descend with the title. Pauline Wynne, the sole survivor of a large family of brothers and sisters, was three or four months older than Arthur; but his mother had planned their union when the last brother died off, and neither the baronet nor his daughter appeared averse, though hitherto only a tacit understanding existed between the two most concerned.

That he should leave the side of Pauline and be seen shaking hands demonstratively with a strange girl upon the walls, and again in the theatre, was in Mrs. Wynne's opinion a fatal mistake, only to be exceeded by the evident satisfaction with which he reported his first meeting with Miss D'Anyer. She kept her countenance at the time and during the ride home, reserving her opinion and counsel for a private interview. The result had left her more than ever confounded.

Imagine her chagrin when her son once more dismounted, and, with a bare word of apology, quitted the carriage side and his friends to seek out the furrier's grandchild, and a country surgeon's daughter, in the very teeth of her prohibition. Arthur must surely be insane, she thought, or under some strange infatuation.

"I say, I say, there must be a powerful magnet on the walls to attract your cousin again," observed Sir Madoc to his daughter, with a dip into his snuffbox.

"Yes, *gratitude*," said Pauline, with a faint note of irony in her tone, and straightway turned her smiling attention to Sir Jenkyn, who lingered near, proud to catch the slightest token of her favour.

"Ah, just as I feared!" argued the mother within herself. "He will lose the substance whilst trifling with the shadow. No doubt that girl will do her best to entangle him. Those low people are so artful." But she openly defended her son by a languid assent to that which Miss Pauline had put forth so doubtfully. "Yes, Pauline, Arthur feels constrained to be civil to the girl. It is so hateful to be under obligations to inferiors."

Yet could Mrs. Wynne have left her visible body in the carriage to watch the races, and in invisible spirit have followed the lieutenant as he walked beside the two young girls who seemed to have no other protector, she might have convinced herself that Muriel was spreading no lures for her son, unless reserve and a sort of timid constraint might enchain him.

The caution of Mr. Holmes rang in her ears, and gave her an uneasy feeling that it was her duty to dismiss the young officer. Yet he was so respectful, and so agreeable withal both to Miss Holmes and herself, that she knew not how to do it. And she was curious enough to seek information, which time had not brought voluntarily.

"Yes," she was told in answer to her inquiries, "Captain Wynne's arm was stout and strong again—Miss Briscoe did not write to the colonel; the recovery of the servant Norris had long been doubtful; he would be a cripple to the end of his days; he remained in their service, in attendance on Mrs. Wynne; no, the ruffians had not been punished. Two men named Blackburn had been apprehended on suspicion, but Norris had been stunned by the first blow, and could not positively swear to them.—Some people had come forward to swear an alibi, and the men were dismissed; as no doubt Miss D'Anyer had heard. A reward had been offered for the capture of the miscreants, but no other persons had been apprehended, and he supposed the real delinquents never would be known."

And all this while the polite lieutenant marvelled that Mr. Holmes should leave his daughter and her young friend to wander there unattended. It was only in reply to a direct query that he was told the doctor had gone back to Northwich; and then he lingered, loth, as he said, to leave them unprotected. This, however, was not said until Muriel suggested that Mrs. Wynne might feel neglected if he remained longer away from her. And it was not until Muriel had assured him more than once that they were "perfectly safe—no one would molest them while so many of the citizens remained on the walls with their wives and daughters," that he seemed at all inclined to take the hint and depart.

Very courteous was his leave-taking, as had been his manner throughout, and Miss Holmes was in ecstasies when he was gone, frequently breaking out into wonderment whether the morrow would bring the handsome young officer to beau them about again.

To her dismay, the morrow brought only a persistent down-pour of rain, which spoiled the races, and kept the feminine portion of the community within doors.

Lucinda Holmes and the other girls grumbled audibly. Muriel said "it was quite as well; the country needed the rain, and it would give her an opportunity to write home," which she did; her meeting with Lieutenant Wynne, and his politeness, figuring largely in her budget of news and inquiries.

He had gone back to his friends with more reluctance than he cared to admit. He had found Muriel the woman as charmingly unsophisticated as Muriel the child, but hedged in by a degree of reserve the child had not displayed. And it occurred to him that this reserve had increased since the departure of the doctor. No hint of her address had been vouchsafed, although sought in all but direct question; and he must trust to chance for meeting with her again. The desirability of such other meeting did not come under consideration.

The brow of Mrs. Wyane was clouded with displeasure on his return, there was a light of jealous fire in the sloe-black eyes of his cousin Pauline, and his uncle, between his pinches of snuff, rallied him on his "devotion to the petticoats," his "enlistment in the corps of Cupid," with more of annoyance than mirth in his tones. Arthur, whom he looked upon as his future son-in-law, was in especial favour with the good gentleman, but his open neglect of Pauline was, to say the least, disrespectful and irritating. It was not what he expected from his nephew.

The lieutenant found that no one but himself regarded his prolonged promenade with the two young ladies in white muslin as "a mere act of courtesy."

Yet really it was nothing more; and, had not Mrs. Wynne again taken the young man to task for his imprudent desertion of his wealthy cousin, "parading to and fro with strange young women, in the very face of Pauline, and driving her to retaliate in a flirtation with that odious Sir Jenkin," it might never have been anything more. The feather might have blown away, but she weighted it with lead, and it went down into her son's heart like a plummet.

He went to bed contrasting modest brown eyes with haughty black ones, and waked from a nightmare in which a black-eyed wolf was about to pounce on a brown-eyed Red Riding Hood.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE WAY TO THE POST.

FLIRTATION is never a safe game for man or woman. Not only can two play at it, but its results are uncertain. Very sure of a man had a woman need be who resorts to it, whether in pique or retaliation. The means taken to draw are as likely to repel, and what is won is rarely worth the winning.

Arthur Wynne had a sort of cousinly affection for Miss Pauline of the Plas, and might have drifted lightly enough into the harbour of matrimony with her. Indeed, he had begun to regard it as a not remote possibility, when she made the mistake of playing off soft-headed and soft-hearted Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson against him. At first she was in the hope of bringing her military cousin more speedily to the point, and, not succeeding in this, she continued it in pique, and perchance carried it a little further than she had originally intended, since the hopes of her devoted slave rose to flood-tide, and only a sudden chill stopped short an ardent avowal of a very sincere passion.

Not that Pauline had thought seriously of encouraging Sir Jenkyn, her latest display was by way of jealous retaliation, and was of all things most unwise with a man of Arthur's temperament, if she wished to secure him. She knew that her aunt desired the family alliance, and that her father regarded it complacently, but she could not say that her cousin had made any special demonstration of regard during his occasional sojourns at the Plas. He had seemed rather to accept a position than to assume it. The assumption was of the three, and not of the one.

Attentive and courteous he had been, as a gentleman and a relative; he had joined her in duets, and listened with delight when she took her Welsh harp in hand and sang the strains of their native bards. He had turned over her music at a newer instrument, at which she was not so proficient—the grand piano being but a recent acquisition—and he had been a complimentary critic. He had held her skeins of silk for winding, her basket when she gathered flowers; had baited her hooks when they had a fishing party on the lake, and all with right good will; but in this he was not exclusive. To be a partner for life was another affair. He had not yet given his heart wholly into her keeping, and whatever chance there was of its surrender vanished with her latest freak of flirtation with Sir Jenkyn.

There was always a dance at the Plas on the Race Friday, and who was so distinguished now as Sir Jenkyn, who of so small account as the lieutenant? It was Sir Jenkyn with whom she danced a minuet; it was Sir Jenkyn who readjusted her floating scarf, who led her to the harp and selected her songs, and who was privileged to whisper his enraptured thanks into her listening ear, and to receive her smiling acknowledgments; Sir Jenkyn who basked in the smiles of the proud beauty until he was half beside himself.

"Pon honour, I think my mother was right. Pauline is flirting desperately. The battery of her black eyes has shot that soft Sir Jenkyn's flowery waistcoat through and through. The poor fellow seems desperately in earnest too. Well, I'll not baulk his chance. If Pauline is playing with him to punish me, she has no heart, and mine is safest in my own keeping. So success to your wooing, Sir Jenkyn!"

Some such meditation sent Arthur Wynne riding through the rain to Chester on the Saturday afternoon, to keep, as he said, an appointment with an old friend in the garrison, of which nothing had been heard when the guests with sporting proclivities had set off to the races in the early morning, promising a list of the winning horses for the home sweepstake on their return.

Mrs. Wynne frowned, Sir Madoc looked loftily displeased, Miss Wynne charmingly reproachful; but he went, with not even his man behind him to grumble at the rain. There was to be a junket in the servants' hall that night, for which the man was good-humouredly set at liberty. Perchance the master desired liberty as well as the man.

A new element had unawares entered into his being, of which his mother's reproaches had first made him dimly aware. He rode forth with his head bent to the slant rain with a restless longing for something unshaped even to his own thought, free to ponder and debate within himself, unobserved, a problem she had left for him to solve.

A soldier, the son of a soldier, early in commission, having a handsome person and easy manner, society had opened its arms to him: and mothers, regarding his lieutenantcy as a step towards a captaincy, had all but flung their daughters at his feet. How was it that, despite all the charmers of all the garrison towns he had known, notwithstanding the fascinations of his cousin Pauline and her fortune to boot, his heart was sound?

This was the problem he set himself to solve in that cheerless twelve-mile ride. The rain had almost ceased by the time he

reached Dee Bridge (which then long and narrow span of seven arches was the only communication between Chester and North Wales), and when he paid his toll at the Bridge Gate, after making his way through a throng of mud-bespattered ponies and frieze-coated Welshmen, some with pretty Welshwomen mounted on pillions behind, he had answered his own questions by others.

Could it be that he had set up a mere child he had lived with a single week as his ideal? Had he unconsciously brought elegant women of fashion, wit, grace, refinement into comparison with that simple maiden who had not even beauty to commend her? Nothing but a pair of soft brown eyes and a voice like a seraph's song.

Nothing more? Yes, a shower of silken curls, an agile form, a pair of tripping feet matched with rounded arms, and shapely hands, teeth like two rows of pearl; but expression was the charm. There was no gainsaying it. He had certainly shrined little Red Riding Hood in his memory—a memory of unselfish devotion to utter strangers, of unstudied gifts and graces fresh from the mint of God. He had looked in lovely faces since, but they bore the stamp of the world, and had not satisfied his soul.

He had rarely stood before a glass to brush his hair, or sat there to have it dressed and powdered by his man, but he, seeing the scar, had remembered the pitying face that bent over him, in the twilight, the gentle fingers that picked out the broken glass and bound up his wounded brow so tenderly. And now that the *child* was gone, and he a man, he had touched that gentle hand again, had looked on those soft brown eyes, on a face no longer disfigured, and it mattered not to him whether Pauline Wynne flirted with Sir Jenkyn or John Jones.

Mrs. Wynne had lent him a key to his own heart; he had unlocked it and looked in.

He must have forgotten his appointment, for he passed the end of Castle-street without turning his head, rode on up Bridge-street to the Plume of Feathers Inn, and gave his horse in charge to an ostler without asking for any friend in waiting. Then, walking on to the junction of Chester's four main thoroughfares—where Cromwell found a fine cross of stone, and left behind only its name—he turned sharply to his right up Eastgate-street, leaving the muddy roadway for the uneven pebbly pavement, and, having passed under the sweeping arch of the Eastgate, turned up a narrow alley on the immediate left of Foregate-street into Post-Office Yard, the location also of the Excise.

There he dropped into the postal box a couple of letters, one bearing the address of Captain Wynne, at the Dépôt, Chatham (the main regiment was on service in St. Domingo), and received from the postmaster, in answer to his inquiry, a franked missive with a great red seal, and two newspapers, the *Times* and the *Morning Post*.

He left the cramped-up Post-Office for the open street, thrust the small newspapers into his breeches pocket, glanced over his brief communication, and stood for a moment hesitating whether he could, as a gentleman, ask the Misses Briscoe for the address of Miss D'Anyer, seeing that she herself had not vouchsafed it. Had he gone, he would have found disappointment in the shape of a sprawling "To Let" on a desolate house.

Turning to retrace his steps through the unwonted bustle of Foregate-street, along which crowds were hurrying singly and in groups, on foot, on horseback, in vehicles, in all stages of drink and excitement, pouring out of the city at the close of the last day's races, he saw a young woman in a cloak and pattens, waiting with a letter in her hand as if for a favourable opportunity to cross the road to the Post-Office, the hood of her cloak well drawn over her bonnet as a protection from the rain, which was not quite over. Courtesy prompted him to hasten to assist her, but ere he could do so, or recognise her features, two drunken boors jostled her from the narrow footpath into the roadway. The insecurity of patten rings on pebble pavement caused her to lose her footing, and she fell in the very front of a horse and vehicle advancing at a reckless pace.

Another second and the animal's hoofs would have been down upon the prostrate girl; but there was Arthur Wynne's strong hand at the horse's head to force and keep him back. It was at his own imminent peril, for the horse suddenly checked in a mad race with another, started and plunged, and swerved aside. People shouted; the driver vociferated angrily, yet pulled the reins; a passer-by helped the cloaked figure to her feet; she was again on the path and out of danger.

The horse was released and on its way, and then the brave young officer pressed forward to assist the young person, who seemed scarcely able to stand.

A startled exclamation burst from his lips. "Miss D'Anyer! You? Thank God, I was at hand! I trust you are uninjured."

Yes, it was Muriel—she who had been in his thoughts all that day, of whom he had dreamed in the night, whose whereabouts he had been so desirous to learn, leaning for support against a wall, faint and pale with pain and fright, her bonnet crushed,

hands and cloak muddy, one patten on, the other, with her letter, in the roadway, crushed, as she might have been, under hoofs and wheels.

She heard the voice, and recognised it with a sort of hazy thankfulness, a temporary surrender to the sick and dizzy feeling which made speech impossible. She had a dim sense of a supporting arm, of the same voice saying, "Brandy, someone—quick! She is fainting!" of a glass which some good soul had already brought being offered to her quivering lips, and then a brief oblivion.

The Hop-Pole Inn was close at hand; but her supporter hesitated to carry her thither, seeing how its doors and windows were occupied with fellows fresh from the racecourse, in all stages of excess and inebriation, filling the air with tobacco fumes and blasphemy. He could not take Miss D'Anyer thither. Better the unpolluted atmosphere of the open street and the compassionate crowd collected by the accident. Her light weight was nothing to him—the nameless thrill which ran through every fibre of his being as he upheld her of course did not count.

He had been wise, for the cool air playing on her cheek revived her. He was glad to see the closed eyelids open and recollection return, though with it a faint carmine flushed the sensitive cheek, and the head, from which the crushed bonnet had been withdrawn by a woman, was raised from his breast.

As she slowly recovered from her brief swoon, under the influence of fresh air and brandy administered with a teaspoon, recollection came of a rude thrust, a twisted patten and ankle, a fall, a glimpse of a monstrous horse, a dread of a crashing hoof, a confusion of cries and sounds, the rush of someone to the rescue, of a hand dragging her up, of her own swift thankfulness.

It was like waking from a dream; yet there was her deliverer, and her ankle pained her when she strove to stand alone. Still she made the effort bravely, alarmed at finding the daylight going, people around her, a woman tying on her bonnet, herself in Arthur Wynne's clasp; though her gratitude was too great for expression, and she felt that his presence there was nothing less than providential.

There was a conflict of feeling in her breast, as she strove to support herself; desire to get back to Watergate-street being uppermost for the time. Then she remembered her letter, only to be told that it was beaten and trodden into the earth, at which a shade passed over her face. She might not have such another opportunity in a hurry.

Arthur Wynne misunderstood her look. "I hope your letter was not important, though I fear it must have been, or you would never have ventured out alone on such an afternoon as this. The streets are positively unsafe for ladies."

"It was a letter to my mother, sir, and she would think it of very small account against the life you have saved. I know you have earned her gratitude as well as mine."

She interrupted a low-voiced speech on her prior claim to his gratitude, with the hurried observation, "You are very kind; but I am better, thank you, and I must go home."

But going home alone was an impossibility, though she left behind her the remaining patten, and made the attempt bravely.

"Do, Miss D'Anyer, lean on me and allow me to support you to your home. But you are really unfit to walk at all. Pray, permit me to send someone for a chair."

"Oh, no, thank you, sir. You are very obliging, but, oh, dear no; I could not go home in a sedan. I must indeed do my best to walk." She had a vision of Mrs. Hopley's consternation at the arrival of one of her apprentices in a sedan-chair, and she underrated the effort to walk.

"Then you must certainly accept the support of my arm. I should be a brute to suffer you to proceed alone," he added, drawing her hand to a firm rest as he spoke.

However reluctantly, she was compelled by pain to accept Lieutenant Wynne's proffer; and whether he was more pleased or sorry at her refusal to go home in a sedan is scarcely to be told; or whether she was more thankful for his support, or ashamed to take his arm in her deplorable plight, is just as doubtful.

It was not that her scarlet cloth cloak was muddy, or that her bonnet had suffered too,—though he would scarcely have cared to meet an acquaintance by the way,—made him suggest the chair. It was that he saw the pain each step occasioned. And seeing it, he wondered at her refusal. But the resolution with which she made light of pain won his admiration. He concluded she had an all-sufficient motive for rejecting his proposition, with so much agony as an alternative, and in all his intercourse with his cousin, Pauline Wynne, he had never felt the touch of her jewelled fingers as he felt whilst Muriel's mitted hand rested on his arm, or gave an involuntary grip when an out-sized pebble in the uneven pavement caused a sharper twinge than before. Gladly would he have suffered in her stead, and he told her so, and bade her lean upon him more securely.

"You cannot think what a pleasure it is to serve you, however slightly; or how proud I should be to escort you, were it not that I feel you are suffering at every step."

They had turned the corner of St. Peter's Church at The Cross, and were almost at the top of Watergate-street, when he said this, looking down into her face and stopping to give her a moment's rest. Just then a party of exhilarated horsemen from the Roodee came dashing up Watergate-street, and swept round the corner of Bridge-street on their way to the Plas.

"Halloo, Wynne! What pretty gipsy have you picked up?" cried one, without slackening speed.

"Bravo, Lieutenant!" called out another amid waving hats and a chorus of hurrahs; and the gallant young officer knew that they were carrying to the Plas more news than the promised "List of the Winners."

Muriel shrank within herself as these elated gentry shouted and hoorayed, and felt as if she, in her disreputable appearance, had somehow compromised her brave and generous protector in the sight of his friends. She wished then she had thought less of Mrs. Hopley's indignation, and more of consequences to her courteous companion. Then the caution of Dr. Holmes came back to her with crushing force. She, sent away from home for reasons to her inscrutable, overtasked and overworked, uncared for by the mistress to whom she was bound, associating with girls of a lower grade, had felt as if a breath from Paradise had wafted across her since Arthur had shaken hands with her again. He was so kind, so gentlemanlike, so respectful; and now did she not owe her life to his bravery? Yet she saw clearly, that for his sake not less than her own, she must cut off the right hand of friendship at once so pleasant and so unsuitable.

There was but a simple name plate on Mrs. Hopley's door; nothing to indicate the calling of those within; but before they, making slow progress under shelter of the Row, had reached it, her resolve was taken, and there, leaning against the door post, she thanked him again for the service he had rendered, but apologised for her inability to invite him within, on the ground that she was but an apprentice to the mantua maker whose name was on the door; though it cost her no small effort to make the admission.

If she had expected a recoil, she was undeceived. Whatever might be his surprise, and he was surprised, he did not show it.

"You will, at least, permit me to inquire after you, Miss D'Anyer, before my leave expires? The injury you have sustained will keep me most uneasy until assured of your recovery."

The moisture in her eyes was unseen in the deepening twilight ; but he could feel the hand tremble he held so firmly in his clasp, as she cut down the bridge of hope with the words :

" I feel your kindness, sir, and shall not forget it. But I have no friends in Chester. I am utterly alone and unprotected here, and you really must not call. And now let me thank you once more, and say ' good bye,' as we said it years ago in Delamere."

" I respect your scruples," he replied, " and will not intrude. But I will say ' good night,' and not ' good bye,' and trust in Providence to meet with you again," and with as graceful courtesy as if she had been a duchess, he raised her hand to his lips, and with a bow departed.

With his departure night seemed to have set in for Muriel. She opened the door, groped her way up the dark staircase, halting on every step, and hoping to find a light in the work-room, but it was deserted. There was a noise and a scuffle in the nursery, as if the children were going to bed. She opened the door softly. She was a favourite there. The children, big and little, dressed and undressed, came crowding around her, with wondering questions and alarm, to which her pale face, her crushed bonnet, muddy cloak, and halting gait gave rise.

She explained that she had been knocked down, nearly run over, had sprained her ankle, and wanted a light ; but she did not think it essential to name the gentleman who had preserved her, or to say that he had brought her to the door.

She said she was faint and weary, and would go to bed ; and the servant lass, seeing how ill she appeared, offered to bathe the injured ankle ; but no one suspected that her heart was aching worse than the foot, though she lay in bed all the morrow, her only companion and comforter being her mother's priceless gift, the little silver-clasped Bible.

And surely she had need of her guide and comforter. If she bore her daily burden passively, it was not because she did not know its weight, but that she never added to it with useless murmuring.

Most of the other girls gave vent to their irritation, or indignation, or splenetic feeling in divers ways. Snappish words, snapped threads, a slip of scissors or needle in spiteful inadvertence, the upset of a pin tray, the snuffing out of candles, the wilful mislaying of card, or stiletto, or patterns, or the mysterious misplacing of the beeswax on Mrs. Hopley's chair to the detriment of her black gown. And to them every holiday was a carnival. She, differing in birth, in temperament, and in training, had no such outlets for her emotions. Her nature and

her conscience restrained her. She could simply endure in silence, and the strength to do it she found under the black cover of the old book. The others had ceased to jeer at her as a "Methody" and "a milksop," since she never obtruded her opinions unsought, and Lucinda Holmes had in fact become her champion; but that was needless, Muriel was not weak, she was only non-combative.

They had all gone to church in the morning in their Sunday best, for the rain had ceased the previous evening, and the sun shone gloriously, even lighting up the bare attic where Muriel lay. True, Mrs. Hopley's youngest, a child some five or six years old, who had a grateful remembrance of one who, when she bumped her head in falling down stairs,

Ran to catch her as she fell,
And kissed the place to make it well,

and who had helped to nurse her through one or two childish ailments with so much patience and loving sympathy, and who told such pretty tales when she was getting better. This little one came to her bedside and prettily enough offered to "come and stay with you, instead of going to church, if mother will let me, Miss D'Anyer. I'll tell her how bad your foot is." But the little one never came back upstairs, so Muriel knew Mrs. Hopley had been less gracious than the little one, or had had a different sense of duty.

Lucinda Holmes brought up Muriel's dinner to the attic, and reported "there was as much bother over my bringing up this bit of cold meat to you as if it was a crime for you to lie in bed for a day, ill or well. Thank goodness I shall be soon out of the skinny old beldame's reach! I wish you were."

"And so do I, Lucinda; but what can't be cured must be endured; and 'grumbling never lightened a pillow,' so my mother used to say. It is not very pleasant to lie here in pain alone; but I have so much reason to be thankful that I was not killed outright that I may well be content that *bad* is not *worse*."

"Well, Muriel, as you seem so content, perhaps you won't mind if you are left by yourself this afternoon. I had promised to go to Shotwick for a walk. You know Mrs. Hopley's old apprentice, Phoebe Horne, is married and lives there; but if you think you would feel lonely I don't mind remaining with you." Lucinda had her pretty gipsy hat half on as she spoke, her eyes turned from the shabby looking glass to the outer sunshine, and Muriel had not the heart to keep her back.

"Nay, nay, that would never do. It is quite bad enough for one of us to be shut up here. There is no reason why you

should be punished for my disaster. Go and enjoy the sunshine whilst you can ; there is a hard week's work before us. Thank you for the offer all the same."

"It was very kind of Lucinda," she murmured to herself when the other was gone, "but I saw she was longing to be off, and no wonder. It would have been thoughtless to expect her to stay moping in this dull room. And perhaps little Missy will come during the afternoon."

But neither little Missy nor anyone else came near her, not even to bring her tea.

"If she wants tea she must come down for it," Mrs. Hopley had said, and so Muriel went without. The sunshine had gone with the hours; dusk crept on; the stars came out; she was alone with her pain, and her inner questionings of right and wrong. She had lain there that day more troubled about her lost letter and her lost friend than about her swollen ankle or her own isolation.

It was a long letter, filling the square sheet in every inner fold. She had given the whole morning to its production; it contained many messages to Milly Hargreaves as well as others, and she knew her mother would expect it. She could not count on such another opportunity to write home; she feared her mother would be anxious. And she could not hope again to meet Lieutenant Wynne as a friend; she had herself closed the door against him. She was convinced she had done right, but the conviction somehow did not bring the consolation with it she might have expected; her friends at hand were so few.

At times she would check her murmurs with a gleam of thankfulness for her escape, and that again brought back the chivalry of Arthur Wynne, and she found herself comparing him with the King Arthur Sir John Mallory had drawn. And so the day had gone by with its alternations of light and shade, until the book she had dipped into from time to time had refreshed and tranquilised her spirit as the bed had rested her limb. Lucinda brought home a sprig of hawthorn and a bunch of daffodils, and they brought sweetness and beauty with them—and a sort of promise.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN CONTRAST.

SPORTING squires in the last century were not desirable society in the withdrawing room, either at the close of a day's hunt or a race meeting ; and those guests of Sir Madoc who had braved the rain for the sake of the last day's race having one or two considerable winners amongst their number, and no heavy losers, rode back to the Plas in most hilarious mood, to which a stoppage at Wrexham to " bait " no doubt contributed.

They rode into the courtyard of the Plas ripe for fun or mischief, and the return of Lieutenant Wynne about an hour later was the signal for uproarious merriment. He was plied with questions about the " maiden all forlorn," " Dorothy Draggletail " was sung out in full chorus, and " The pretty gipsy maid " was toasted at table and jested about afterwards in such wise, that had Lieutenant Wynne been of his sire's temperament he would have had more than one duel on his hands before morning. But something of his mother's languor had tempered his father's fiery spirit in him, and he had never forgotten the innocent horror of a certain little girl when told that his father's arm was wounded in a duel.

That a stain darker than the brand of Cain should rest upon the duellist was a daring assumption, one not in accord with the military code of honour, but he was then at an impressionable age, and the novel theory of the unsophisticated child had certainly impressed him ; possibly as enforcing the creed of his old tutor, a man of rare worth and excellence, who was given to think for himself.

At all events Muriel's remark had served to restrain him many a time before ; it served him in good stead then. He left the convivial and noisy party, with Sir Madoc at their head, to their mirth and their wine, simply saying that he had a letter of importance to answer ; and though someone darted after him to draw him back, he did not return. In the morning, when all were sober, he begged that he might hear no more unseemly jests on the subject, at the same time narrating just so much of the accident he had witnessed, and of his interposition to prevent a fatality, as explained his companionship with the young lady, whose name he did not suffer to transpire. He lost none of his own dignity, and he did make some of the rude jesters a little ashamed.

Something of his " absurd civility to a bedraggled damsel " reached the ears of Mrs. Wynne and of Pauline, but the important

missive of which he was the bearer filled the mind of the former to the exclusion of all minor matters.

Captain Wynne had obtained his Majority! It was a quietly made announcement, accompanied with regret for the death which had led to his own promotion, and also that his son had not obtained his step at the same time. But of these regrets Mrs. Wynne said nothing when communicating the main fact to Sir Madoc and Miss Wynne over the breakfast table that Sunday morning. She looked as if a new honour had fallen on herself, yet at the same time affected an air of easy indifference which imposed on no one.

Her son made no secret of his satisfaction, and Sir Madoc grew important. The newspapers containing the official gazette were duly circulated, and Major Wynne was the topic of the hour. Not until the ladies had retired to dress for church had Sir Madoc an opportunity to say in private to his nephew:

"I say, Arthur, how is it you have not stepped into your father's old shoes?"

"Perhaps, sir, they were considered too large for me to fill," the young man answered with a pleasant smile. "But, jesting apart, I could scarcely expect to take precedence of our senior Lieutenant, and there would have been good reason for jealousy had father and son both been promoted the same day, although I believe my father expected it. Some promise of the kind was made to him last year."

"Then, I say, I hope you are not disappointed, look you?" And out came Sir Madoc's snuffbox, to be offered mechanically to Arthur, and declined with a bow.

"Disappointed! Certainly not. I am young enough to wait. It would have been an act of injustice to a gallant officer—one with a wife and three fine children—had I stepped over his head. I could scarcely have worn my honours comfortably in such a case. But here come the ladies."

Horses and carriages were at the door, the gentlemen loitering in the great entrance hall hung with the spears and shields and bows of bygone Welshmen, when Mrs. Wynne, who had been unusually fastidious over her toilet, descended the stairs, followed by one or two others, and the proud form of Pauline, as fashionably faultless in her attire as her elaborately arrayed aunt.

Sir Madoc pressed forward gallantly, and led forth his airy and juvenile sister-in-law by the tips of her white and jewelled fingers, which mittens left revealed, expecting Arthur to follow with Pauline.

He approached her for the purpose, saying, "I am at your service, Pauline;" but, ignoring his graceful bow and extended hand, she passed him with a haughty inclination of the head, smiled graciously, and said, "Sir Jenkyn, may I trouble you?" and, placing the tips of her gloved fingers in the ready palm of her new esquire, left her cousin standing to bite his lip and transfer his courtesy to a Miss Trevanion, whom he escorted to her seat beside his cousin with recovered composure.

He might be disconcerted, but only for the moment, and he was not particularly jealous. A week earlier he might have felt and acted differently under such a slight. That day he took the matter very coolly; and the amused smile on his countenance as he left the side of the carriage with a bow, caused Miss Wynne to bite her lip, at once perplexed and displeased.

He and Sir Jenkyn, and one or two other men were mounted, but he did not hurry his steed, and he saw the infatuated young baronet ride on ahead to be ready at the church to assist Miss Wynne to alight, without any of the jealous fluttering the young lady might desire to provoke.

There were always servants in attendance, or ostlers from the inns hanging about to take charge of horses during service, so many of the congregation came from a distance to Wrexham old church; but when the service was over that Sunday morning, *one* of the horsemen of Sir Madoc's party turned the head of his beast towards Chester, and left the field open to his rival, for that day at least.

Whenever Sir Madoc was annoyed, his snuffbox was most in request; and he unconsciously half emptied it that morning before they reached the Plas. He had almost forgotten his ordinary courtesy to his sister-in-law on their stoppage, had not an amazed "Sir Madoc!" reminded him; and no sooner were they all out of the carriage, than he drew Pauline aside and demanded what she had done to drive her cousin away. He had observed Sir Jenkyn's assiduous attentions, and his daughter's graciousness, and set Arthur's unexpected desertion down to a fit of jealous spleen.

Pauline made a like mistake.

"Oh, my dear sir, let the gallant lieutenant gallop his jealousy down. If he chooses to turn cavalier to bedraggled damsels overnight, I may surely select my cavalier in the morning. I have read the gentleman a lesson, that is all."

"Well, well, my dear, but don't make a mistake. Arthur has a high spirit, and, look you, he won't be trifled with."

"Nor will I be trifled with;" and she swept away, leaving her sire to the solace of his brilliant snuffbox.

He made but an indifferent host that Sunday, and Mrs. Wynne, in the newness of self-elation and importance, had so much to say of "the Major," that she failed to observe it, as she had failed to observe the bye-play of Miss Pauline, or the absence of her son.

"Major Wynne" was not, however, an inexhaustible topic for conversation, nor her audience illimitable, and when dinner was served, she could not but observe with dismay that no Arthur was there to conduct Miss Wynne to the dining room, and that Sir Jenkin was accepted as a substitute somewhat too graciously.

She and Sir Madoc exchanged inquiring glances across the long table from time to time, but they did not bring back Arthur Wynne, or prevent Pauline from smiling on the beaming Sir Jenkin.

Festivities did not end with the race week. Balls and routs, notably one at Eaton House, were to follow. For this Mrs. Wynne was in the dilemma of fashionable dames nearer our own time, and vowed she had "nothing to wear." Accompanying this avowal was another, that she was "monstrously unlucky in offending the queer-looking mantua maker!" And since Lady Grosvenor's assurance that the quaint little body was of a verity the unrivalled fashioner of ladies' gear, and kept a skilled embroideress on her premises, there had been a sharp contest between Mrs. Wynne's love of dress and her pride, in which the former, being backed by personal vanity, came off victor.

Monday forenoon witnessed the self-abasement of Mrs. Wynne and the triumph of Mrs. Hopley. The Wynnes' pony phaeton stood long at the door, whilst the lady employed all her arts of apology and persuasion to soften the offended wielder of scissors and measuring tape, beseeching the little woman, with very unwonted humility, to undertake a robe for her to wear at Lady Grosvenor's ball.

Had she not adroitly made Lady Grosvenor's introduction the lever, it is doubtful whether she would have moved Mrs. Hopley with all her suing. That shrewd calculator knew it was not politic to offend her noble patroness any more than it was wise to drive away a customer who avowed she was "willing to pay any price" for her wares; and the monetary consideration had full weight.

Playing with the lady's fears lest she should have no befitting dress for the occasion, just so long as to keep up her own dignity

and to pay back her debt of spleen, Mrs. Hopley at last consented to oblige Mrs. Wynne, yet "solely out of respect to Lady Grosvenor's recommendation."

So much conceded, materials were brought forth, and a consultation ensued, in which the lady's langour almost disappeared. Ignoring her forty-five years, her matronhood, and her constitutional delicacy, the beauty of a bygone day rejected all suggestions of brocade or taffeta as too old and heavy, and would fain have a robe as diaphanous and airy as a Parisian belle. A dress styled "a curricule and petticoat" was in vogue; for this azure gauze was selected, with satin for the under skirt. The upper skirt, arranged like a sort of classic drapery, crossed on the left side, where it was so disposed as to reveal the under one, and this upper curricule she required bordering with a wreath of satin-stitch embroidery in white silk; a similar wreath to encircle the low edge of the narrow skirt.

It was in vain Mrs. Hopley protested there was not sufficient time for embroidery and making both. She "had so many robes bespoke for the same occasion." Mrs. Wynne's diplomacy prevailed, and the embroideress was summoned to take instructions.

As Mrs. Hopley spoke to the show-room assistant, "Bid Miss D'Anyer come hither!" Mrs. Wynne started. Surely her ears had deceived her! She thought her eyes had deceived her also, when, in a few minutes, a tall, fragile girl, in a plain dress of striped grey-and-white gingham, came into the room, who evidently walked in pain, clinging to the doorpost as she entered; then, with a quick smile irradiating her face, advanced with extended hand, apparently misinterpreting her summons into the show-room.

"Oh, Mrs. Wynne, this is kind. I thought you had forgotten me," she began.

Mrs. Hopley looked bewildered. What previous knowledge had Miss D'Anyer of the lady? Mrs. Bancroft's questioning of Muriel in Eaton Park, years before, had scarcely made on her a momentary impression, and was not remembered now.

Mrs. Wynne was disconcerted; but whilst her own locket hung before her eyes on Muriel's neck, there was no affecting ignorance, no excuse for refusing the proffered hand, which she took with just sufficient courtesy, only to drop it hastily as Muriel went on to say,—

"I suppose Lieutenant Wynne told you of my accident. I should certainly have been killed but for his bravery."

Mrs. Wynne froze on the instant. Her fashionable eyeglass was raised to her cold optics; then they travelled down to the

limping foot, and upwards to the astonished eyes of the young girl, which they fixed with an icy stare, causing the blood to rush to Muriel's face with a consciousness of the sudden change, and of some unknown offence.

"I heard that my son was seen with a bedrabbled female he had picked up out of the mud—saved from being run over, or something," was said, as from a lofty height. "And so you were the person. May I ask if you had an appointment with my son, as he happened to be so conveniently at hand?"

"Mrs. Wynne!" The tone of surprise and pain in which this was ejaculated was in itself a denial. Up to Muriel's brow surged the crimson tide of injured delicacy. "I was on my way to the Post-Office, madam, when the accident occurred. I did not see my preserver until I came to myself. I believe I fainted."

"I shall put my own construction on your indirect answer to my question, Miss D'Anyer. My son himself spoke of an appointment he had made. It occurs to me you are presuming on the little service your grandmother rendered to us some few years back, and are throwing yourself in the way of Lieutenant Wynne in a manner that is neither delicate nor seemly—in *your* position especially. Mrs. Hopley will do well to keep a stricter watch over her assistants in future. It is not to *her* credit that they should consort with young officers."

Muriel felt as if she should choke. All this was so utterly unjust.

"You are under a mistake, Mrs. Wynne. I have neither sought your son, nor encouraged him to seek me. I should forfeit my own self-respect were I to do either." And not another word did she say either in self-defence or justification. Mrs. Wynne stood revealed before her, all that Mr. Holmes and Lucinda had portrayed. The locket, so long worn in remembrance, was henceforth seen on Muriel's neck no more.

Muriel's quiet disclaimer was lost in that of Mrs. Hopley, who professed to be shocked, at the same time that she sought to uphold the credit of her establishment. In her own mind she was not sorry to see the discomposure of the haughty Mrs. Wynne, though she knew little what it was all about.

With a wave of her hand Mrs. Wynne dismissed the subject, and turned to the discussion of embroidery as coolly as if the young woman standing there—with infinite pain, mental and physical—to take her orders, was simply the mantua-maker's assistant, and had never held other relation to her.

She rode back to the Plas full of her discovery, thinking to overwhelm her son with it.

Lieutenant Wynne had again gone to Chester, she was told. "Say I desire to see him on his return," were her orders to Norris, and Arthur found her pacing the raised terrace which ran along one side of the castellated mansion, all eager and impatient to tell him that the Miss D'Anyer, whose relations gave themselves such airs in Delamere, was nothing but a mantua-maker's apprentice, a common embroideress about to work for her; and, as such, no associate for the son of Major Wynne.

"I am aware of Miss D'Anyer's position, madam," said he with respectful calm; "but I consider that she is altogether superior to that position, and has excellences I have looked for in vain amongst my ordinary acquaintance."

It was a surprise to find her son equally well informed with herself; and more than a surprise to discover that he held Muriel to be "superior to her position;" and that he flamed up with indignation at the bare suggestion that she was "laying a snare to entrap him"—was "luring him from his allegiance to his cousin."

"You are aspersing the character of a most noble girl," he cried hastily, "and I should be unworthy to rank with gentlemen if I entered no protest against it."

He defended, not himself, but Muriel; maintained that their meeting was fortuitous on her part on each occasion, that she had only accepted his arm when unable to walk, had herself informed him of her apprenticeship, and he wound up by saying, "If Pauline had but half Miss D'Anyer's modest reserve and delicacy, my so-called 'allegiance to my cousin' might have been a fact and not a mere fancy of yours."

"A mere fancy of mine! Compare Pauline Wynne of the Plas with a mere milliner's apprentice!" and the lady tapped her fan irritably on the stone balustrade of the terrace, which overlooked a picturesque garden scene. "You must have lost your senses over the girl! Surely, Arthur, you have not entangled yourself in any way with such a plebeian?"

For a moment Arthur Wynne pressed his lips tightly together; then he answered with deliberation:—

"I have seen Miss D'Anyer but three times since she was a child—a child, madam, to whom we were greatly indebted. I was providentially at hand to rescue the young lady (he emphasised the word) from great peril. There can be no possibility of 'entanglement' with one so pure and so reserved; and, if I compared her with Miss Wynne, to the disadvantage of the latter—look there!"

He had drawn himself up to his full height as he spoke, in

feature, manner, and bearing the reflex of his handsome father ; and now he flung his left arm out above the balustrade, as if to point his speech.

The fine afternoon had brought the whole party out of the house ; but there, in the distance, sauntering along a shady walk by the border of the lake, might be seen at intervals the fair Pauline, evidently weaving snares for the "entanglement" of Sir Jenkyn, on whose arm she was leaning, whilst she toyed with her fan and answered his enamoured glances with bewitching smiles, as if no question of a cousin's attachment had ever risen.

"Pauline has herself dispelled the glamour of her own eyes ; so heartless a coquette is not the wife for me," he went on, "and I must confess I have seen no woman in our circle who reaches the high standard of Miss D'Anyer : until I do I am likely to remain a bachelor."

Without another word he turned away and joined Sir Madoc, then reading the *Times*, on a stone bench some paces off, dipping into the old gentleman's snuffbox as preliminary to a chat, for which the political aspect of affairs and the newspapers Arthur had brought from the post-office on Saturday furnished material.

Mrs. Wynne was aghast ; all her schemes were blown over. Sir Madoc was hale and strong ; the chance of her husband's succession to the baronetcy small indeed, to say nothing of the chances of war. As Pauline's mother-in-law, she had hoped to reign at the Plas, where indeed she did spend more of her time than Major Wynne might be supposed to care for ; but "Celia was delicate, and the air among the Welsh mountains so pure, and suited her so well, he could not find in his heart to keep her in garrison with him." At least that was the reason generally assigned for her long periods of absence ; if it was not the whole reason, it concerned no one but himself.

She had herself a belief, and had impressed Sir Madoc that she stayed there in part to watch over Pauline, and bind her to Arthur—and now *he* repudiated his cousin. And what had he set in her place ? A country manufacturer's daughter, sewing for her living. Oh, it was too horrible ! She must write to the Major : Arthur must be recalled. But she must give no inkling who was Pauline's low-born rival—there was no trusting her husband's Quixotism. And before another day dawned the letter was written—and despatched. Ostensibly it contained her congratulation of her husband on his promotion.

Mrs. Hopley had questioned Muriel with some asperity ; but the explanation was so clear and simple, the repudiation of Mrs. Wynne's unfounded suspicions so decisive, that it scarcely

needed her own first experience of Mrs. Wynne to convince her of Muriel's truth. And Mrs. Hopley, hard and strict where her own interest was concerned, did not much trouble herself with matters beyond. She just advised Muriel to keep out of the lieutenant's way; a superfluous piece of advice, considering her inability to take a step without pain. She, moreover, found a liniment and a bandage for the injured ankle, and said: "You need not come downstairs to meals; I will send them up to you, so that you can rest your foot and get on with the embroidery at the same time, for that will have to be done if you sit up all night over it."

Muriel placed a footstool beneath her frame as a rest for her foot; but sitting in the one position all that evening, through all the next long day and seemingly longer night, and far into the Wednesday, with only brief intervals for food, or the shifting of the gauze on the frame, was not such rest as a sprained ankle requires; and when Muriel next went to bed, she was compelled to use the ready arm of Lucinda Holmes as a crutch.

There had been some calculation in Mrs. Hopley's sudden show of kindness. "It's best to prevent the girl from being wholly disabled. I could not spare her at this busy season," she had argued with herself. And her kindness was but short-lived.

The city of Chester contained an overplus of old maids, poodles and parrots (of the latter many funny anecdotes were told); and it was the custom amongst the ancient spinsters of genteel birth and small independence to give periodical tea parties, where gossip was handed round with the cake and tea.

It so happened that at one of these staid tea parties in Abbey Square, the Misses Briscoe heard a bit of gossip which set their ancient ears a-tingling, and caused them to uplift their skinny hands in horror.

Miss D'Anyer, the pupil they had trained so carefully and so piously, had been seen to leave the Theatre Royal, and that too in the company of a military officer; and the same officer had been seen loitering about Watergate-street and the Rows more than once since.

The very next morning—on the Tuesday that is—the two spinsters laboured up Mrs. Hopley's staircase, bent on "doing their duty to the misguided young woman;" and Miss D'Anyer, still more laboriously descended from the workroom to be confronted with them, and with Mrs. Hopley, who professed like horror of "so sinful a place as a playhouse," and who saw in the companionship of the officer a confirmation of Mrs. Wynne's accusation.

"What is this I hear, Miss D'Anyer? That you have been seen at the theatre in company with a military man?" she began stiffly. "Do you mean to bring a scandal on my establishment?"

"Have you forgotten the pious and decorous training you received from us?" questioned Miss Briscoe severely, with her hands folded across her waist.

"No, Miss Briscoe, but there is some mistake. It was Dr. Holmes who took his daughter and myself to the play. Lieutenant Wynne only came and spoke to us as we were leaving," answered Muriel in self-defence, but with all the composure of truth, not doubting credence.

Mrs. Hopley, who kept her standing as usual, without a thought save for the inquisition which was to clear herself of all knowledge of the presumed offence, caught at the name. "Then it was Lieutenant Wynne? There was *some* truth in Mrs. Wynne's allegations! And you dared to deny them!"

"I could not deny seeing him at the theatre; Mrs. Wynne was present, and must have known it. And she must have seen that I was with Dr. Holmes, who was not a stranger to her. I only denied an appointment with the lieutenant, and I still deny it."

"Whoever this Dr. Holmes may be," put in Miss Briscoe loftily, "he was unfit to be a parent if he could take his own daughter and a young lady who had been trained in virtuous and religious principles, into so vile and corrupt a place. If I were to enter a theatre I should expect the floor to sink, and the roof to fall on me and carry me down to the bottomless pit, as thirty human souls were carried twenty years back, within almost a stone's throw of this spot, when seventy more were maimed or scarred for life."

"In Puppet-show Alley that was," supplied Betty, as commentator.

"Yes! Miss D'Anyer, the people had gone out on the Fifth of November to witness a puppet-show, as thoughtlessly as you allowed yourself to be taken to a theatre. It was a blasphemous show—'The Devil and Dr. Faustus'—and like a judgment upon them all, eight hundred weight of gunpowder stored in a room below exploded and sent them headlong to perdition. The city shook as with an earthquake, the eruption was as that of a volcano, the fiery shower shot high into the air and strewed the roads with wreckage and with horrors, then flames arose, and all the populace seemed gathered to extinguish them. It was a direful calamity, an unparalleled scene of terror and consternation.

I and my sister amongst the spectators of the dire catastrophe could but think of the Cities of the Plain, and hope the awful warning would not be lost upon the multitude. There was weeping and mourning in the city for the lost. John Wesley, and other pious divines, improved the occasion, and for a time there was a talk of closing the playhouse doors. But a wicked cabal prevailed, because, forsooth, centuries had gone by since the ancient walls of St. Nicholas had echoed prayer or praise, and desecration was no new thing. Women had no voice in such matter, or *we* should have entered our protest. We could only, in our sphere, do what we could to enlighten the minds of our scholars, and lead them to shun the spot. Yet we find you, Miss D'Anyer, one of our most promising pupils, so regardless of your own soul as to——"

Muriel's patience had reached its limit. She was in too much pain to listen longer to Miss Briscoe's harangue. She interrupted her with, "My mother is not regardless of her own soul, or of mine; she is a good woman, and a good Christian, yet she and my father took me to see a pantomime when I was quite a little one. If she were here now she would not disapprove of my going, I am certain."

Miss Briscoe and Miss Betty uplifted their hands and eyes.

"Nor of meeting Lieutenant Wynne, I suppose," put in Mrs. Hopley sharply.

"Nor of *speaking* to Lieutenant Wynne," corrected Muriel quietly.

"You are bold, Miss D'Anyer," almost gasped Miss Betty, in dismay at the reply to her august sister, who had risen and stood trembling with contending astonishment, feebleness, and irritation, leaning on her silver-mounted stick for support.

"Lieutenant Wynne!" she ejaculated, to be sure! I remember *that* was the name of the young man who had the impertinence and audacity to accost you on the walls during our weekly promenade! And he is still following you about, I hear! Someone should acquaint your grandmother. It is little to your credit, Miss D'Anyer, to encourage such advances. And I consider it my duty to warn you against the consequences of permitting such freedom. It is a reflection on the moral training you received from us."

Muriel looked from one to the other. The speech of Mrs. Hopley was sharp, that of Miss Briscoe deliberate and incisive, but she had no opportunity to edge in a word. At last even her quiet spirit was roused.

"These are calumnies, and I decline further reply," she said, her cheek flushing as she spoke. Then turning her back, she

limped away, leaving them to say their worst, and soon was bending over her frame, in anguish of mind and body hardly to be borne.

Whatever Mrs. Hopley thought she said no more on the subject to Muriel, but she looked stern, and there was no further compassion for the sprained ankle, at least from her.

However sorry the other girls might be they had no leisure for anything but their work. Lucinda Holmes, after helping her upstairs that night, rubbed the swollen joint, and replaced the bandage very cleverly, and kindly, before they went to bed.

So, too, in the morning, and for many nights and mornings to follow; for unless the chair nearest her own chanced to be vacant for a brief space, Muriel could only relieve the swollen and painful member by lying in bed on the Sabbaths, which, as often as not, meant the surrender of such meals as her friend Lucinda was not at hand to convey to their attic; for after a frock was greased in carrying a dinner upstairs, Mrs. Hopley would not suffer her own children to wait on Muriel, or they would have been willing enough. And surely their food was neither so good nor so plentiful as to leave a margin for fasting. Buttermilk and potatoes were often enough their only midday meal, and when the buttermilk was not stale, Muriel preferred it to the coarse beef which, during the summer months, was generally tainted, or to the cabbage and bacon boiled together, seeing that the rustiness of the latter was apt to flavour the former.

At her own home, food and cookery had been of the first order, John D'Anyer's fastidious palate having to be catered for, and not all her long initiation at the Misses Briscoe's had served to reconcile his daughter to unwholesome diet. She cared not how plain it might be so that it was fresh and, as a matter of choice, ate her bread dry to avoid the rancid butter served to the apprentices.

To say that Muriel never protested, never complained, never uttered a moan when her foot throbbed and burned with pain, would be to place her beyond the pale of humanity; but as a rule she bore it bravely, said, "Complaining will not cure," and submitted as to the inevitable.

Weeks went by before she could get another letter written home and posted; and then she had so much to tell of her meeting with Arthur Wynne, of the accident in which her former letter had been lost, and of her rescue by him, that she said less of the prolonged agony of the sprain than might have been expected. For one thing, she heard Mrs. Hopley say with contempt, "such a fuss over a mere sprain," and she had no mind to make her mother uncomfortable over what others thought a slight matter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MURIEL'S VISITORS.

Mrs. WYNNE presented herself no more at Mrs. Hopley's.

The airy blue dress was duly finished and duly sent home, and Mrs. Wynne accepted the sacrifice of the young embroideress without a pang of remorse. She had been told that the poor girl, who was evidently in pain (and who had once ministered to her repose), would be compelled to work day and night to execute her order, yet she had not abated a tittle of her demand. Not a leaf or a flower of the elaborate wreath could be omitted lest the design should appear defective. She was not accustomed to consider consequences to others—and inferiors. Her own requirements were paramount. The dress was scanned critically through the lady's eyeglass, and declared to be "positively faultless," with an air of languid satisfaction. Of aching hands, or eyes, or chest, or foot, what thought or cared the lady? The dress was ordered and paid for; its production had been Mrs. Hopley's concern, not hers. She little deemed what a robe of Nessus it would prove to her.

Vanity was in the ascendant. Parisian fashion declared that women should drape themselves classically, not clothe, and many a silly life was sacrificed in the desire to be "slim and genteel," even on this side the Channel.

Forty-five years had not brought to Mrs. Wynne wisdom. It was useless for more sensible Owen to expostulate. An under petticoat was dispensed with when an additional one should rather have been worn, and in this the lady only followed a very common and foolish practice.

"I tell you, Owen, it is superfluous. You might think I was an old woman to be coddled. How could the robe cling gracefully with so many garments beneath it?"

Owen shook her head behind the lady's back most ruefully and expressively, but she had the gift of silence.

"There!" said Mrs. Wynne, as she surveyed herself in the long Venetian glass in her dressing room, when fully attired, "the effect is charming. I protest I look almost as young and captivating as Pauline. Yet the dear girl is not without taste, I am proud to say, for I have helped to form it."

Miss Wynne's taste was certainly better than that of her aunt, and though her outer robe of white crape was almost as diaphanous as the blue gauze, there was a trifle more of sleeve and bodice, less clinging of the skirt, and the natural flowers which looped

the trimmings here and there had kept no one awake to grow them.

Yet of all the dresses at Lady Grosvenor's ball Mrs. Wynne's bore off the palm of fashion. She was flattered, admired, envied, and—scandalised. Beaus fluttered around her, displayed their ivory teeth, their scented kerchiefs, and jewelled snuffboxes, and declared she eclipsed all the beauties in the room; and she, trifling with her ivory-mounted fan, languished sentimentally and believed them.

Once or twice she shivered, and her observant son gravely suggested that she was too thinly clad, and offered to procure a warm wrap, but the lady said, "No! my scarf is sufficient," and though the scarf was little more than a film, he knew of old it was no avail to remonstrate.

There were caleshes to cover curled and powdered and befrizzled heads, and fur-lined mantles to enfold bare shoulders, during the long ride home through the raw morning air. But the mischief was already done.

The penalty had to be paid for vanity and folly. A cold settled in the fine lady's limbs, and kept her prisoner to her couch for weary months, during which Pauline and Sir Madoc both grew pretty well weary of her, so many were her lamentations and her capricious fancies.

Owen and Norris had a sorry time of it, and more than once were on the point of throwing up their service, she was so difficult to satisfy or to manage.

And, thanks to her own manoeuvre, her son, recalled to his regiment at her suggestion, was no longer by her side to administer to her comfort or her whims. Yet when he came to say farewell at her bed side, she blamed him for leaving her to suffer alone, and when he was gone, could only console herself with the reflection that he was "separated from that artful Miss D'Anyer."

Long months before Dr. Wilmslow, summoned from Chester, had, after many consultations with the local doctor, and with much humming and hahing, and much deliberation over the gold head of his cane, counselled her removal to the baths at Buxton, she had learned to contrast the willing service and gentle handling of little Muriel in the past with that of her own maid or hired nurse. But she was not one whit softened towards the Muriel of the present, the Muriel in whom her son saw so many hidden charms, and had she known how that son had haunted Watergate-street, and, failing to see Miss D'Anyer, had ventured to write to her on his recall, her cup of bitterness would have run over.

The woman of fashion, cramped and drawn with rheumatism, had no resource within herself. A game at picquet by her bedside, a sentimental novel monotonously read out by her maid, was all she had to fill her intervals of pain. The higher light of religion had not dawned for her, and Muriel might have been envied, not despised, for she had a solace of which the other knew nothing.

She had, besides, the enviable faculty of seeing the sunbeam where the other saw only the motes, and, whilst Mrs. Wynne blamed her niece and her attendants as "unsympathetic," "inattentive," "awkward," Muriel could say, "I should never have known how much goodness there was in Lucinda if I had not sprained my foot, or how much Mrs. Hopley's little ones cared for me. They never were so kind to me before." And I am not certain that she did not regard her accident with something akin to complaisance, if not altogether with satisfaction, when she read over the letter received from Lieutenant Wynne.

That letter was brought to Muriel in the workroom, with her breakfast, by one of Mrs. Hopley's youngsters, who exhibited a shilling, and said, "An officer on horseback gave it to me to bring the letter safe to you. He had a soldier behind him on another horse, and he asked me ever so many questions about your bad foot, and he did seem so sorry."

Muriel laid the letter down to be read when the child was gone, conscious of rising colour in her cheeks, and an unusual flutter beneath her bodice. Mrs. Wynne's aspersions were fresh in her mind; could she have said aught to call forth this communication? With compressed lips she tore it open and read:—

"My dear Miss D'Anyer,—I trust your goodness will pardon the liberty I take in addressing you by letter. I can only plead in extenuation that I am unexpectedly recalled to rejoin my regiment in Chatham, and can therefore have no other opportunity for expressing my deep-felt sorrow for an accident which must have caused you much suffering (though I thank God you did not lose your life). I could not leave the neighbourhood without a syllable of regret or farewell. Indeed, I am troubled at going away without seeing you again—going away with no assurance from yourself either that your pain has abated or that you are doing well. Never came a recall to duty less opportunely; for I also have to leave my mother seriously indisposed. But a soldier has no choice. He must obey orders, and he has no abiding place, no foreknowledge whether his next 'route' may carry

him to scenes of peace or war. I, however, cherish a hope that at some future time I may meet with you again under more favourable auspices; but, should I never have that happiness, allow me to say that the remembrance of our brief friendship will be ever with me an ennobling and purifying influence.

"Before closing this epistle, it is my pleasing duty to convey to you the grateful thanks of Major Wynne for your kind offices in the past, which he has been denied the opportunity to tender earlier. It is with unspeakable regret that I am thus compelled to take leave, but, believe me, Miss D'Anyer, with every sentiment of gratitude and esteem, and with heartfelt wishes for your recovery and happiness,—I remain, ever your true friend,

ARTHUR WYNNE."

Twice had Muriel read the letter through before she remembered her breakfast, hungry as she had been, and yet a third time she was conning it, when ascending footsteps warned her to put it away. But she could not put away the emotions, the images, the reflections, it had aroused from slumber. And complex enough they were. She had sacrificed friendship to propriety and duty when she dismissed Arthur Wynne at Mrs. Hopley's door, and she had met Mrs. Wynne's insinuations with a clear conscience so far. But deep down in her heart she had unwittingly embalmed his looks and words, and his kiss was fresh upon her hand. She could not dismiss him from her thoughts—and she did not try. Not until she read his letter had she known that there lurked in her breast the contradictory hope to meet him again somewhere. And now that hope was echoed by himself. He did not shrink from her. His father did not, else why that message confided to him? He had said farewell, but he had said it as a friend, and a friend he must ever be to her, even if they never did meet again. It was clear he knew nothing of his mother's unkindness, and she was glad of it.

Neither did she know anything of his unsatisfactory leave taking at the Plas, or of his parting interview with his mother, or of the many letters begun and destroyed in the attempt to say no more to her than circumstances warranted, though the very need to say farewell had brought the conviction that to say it as a *friend* only required an effort of self-control and self-abnegation which put his manhood to the test.

She did not know how much manly love had gone to the composition of a letter which might satisfy the demands of friendship without disturbing her serenity by any premature expression of regard.

Muriel took it simply as she found it ; but she pondered every word, noted his regret and his hope, and altogether the letter was a solace to her, and in thinking of it and the writer—always as a friend—much of her pain was deadened.

But somehow, as the weeks went by, she seemed to grow thinner and more fragile. Once or twice she fainted at her work ; a window was opened, there was a rush for water ; but no sooner had the faintness passed than she had to take up her needle and resume her stitchery, the interruption being commented on as "a nuisance" by the hard taskmistress ; whereupon Lucinda Holmes muttered audibly and with sufficient point, "There's many a worse nuisance than that in this house."

Indeed, about that time Miss Holmes let her rebellious spirit loose more than once. She boldly asserted at table that their "food was neither wholesome nor sufficient, and that she was thankful she was not going to stay there to be killed by inches!"

This was towards the end of June, when she looked for the coming of her father to see her indentures cancelled and to carry her away, and she was in a rebellious mood accordingly. Her only regret was that she should leave Muriel behind with no one to take her part. She had learned to love her, and from her example to think of others as well as herself, though she did say, "I don't know what you'll do when I'm gone. You're so provokingly tame and submissive. I wish I could leave you a bit of my spirit, for you'll want it." But she had a scheme in her head of which she said nothing to anyone except her father when he came.

Very stiffly did Mrs. Hopley decline to give a day's holiday to Miss D'Anyer when Dr. Holmes solicited it "on the occasion," although she could not well refuse him permission to see the young lady, or to examine her foot and prescribe for her as a medical man when he had seen her. But she could bridle up at the suggestion of "a more generous diet," and ask "What he meant by such an insinuation?" and "if he thought, when food was at famine prices, she could afford to keep Miss D'Anyer in idleness whilst she rested her foot, forsooth?"

Sad and lingering was the parting between the two girls, dissimilar as they were, even though the one was regaining her freedom, and Muriel felt that she ought to rejoice with her ; but she likewise felt that she was losing a very genuine friend, and Lucinda was sorry to leave her behind.

"Never mind, Muriel, cheer up," she said, as she saw the tears on the other's cheeks, "it's always darkest before the

dawn, you have told me many a time, and something may turn up before long to serve the old brute out."

"Hush, Lucinda!"

"I sha'n't hush. She is an old brute. I dare say she'll crow over you when I'm gone, and there's no one to stand up for you; but don't let her crow too soon, that's all. And now, good-bye. We may see each other again some day."

"I hope so," said Muriel; "here or there," and she pointed upwards.

Whereupon Lucinda ran off precipitately to join her good father at the door below.

"I wouldn't gratify the old thing by shedding a tear, lest she should say I was sorry to leave her, but I could have burst out sobbing when Muriel said that, for she looks to me more like going to Heaven than to a home such as mine," she said to her father as they left the house, and he made no reply. He had a like opinion.

Three days only had gone by when another visitor came to see Miss D'Anyer—came, too, in Mrs. Hopley's temporary absence, and, through the open door, beheld Muriel descend the stairs painfully and laboriously, grasping the balustrades to lower herself from the stair on which she was seated to the one below.

Mrs. Kingsley, for it was she, hurried to her assistance, and surely never was good woman more shocked at the change since she had seen Muriel last.

"Oh, my dear child," she cried, "how ill you do look! I would not credit Dr. Holmes when he came and asked me to write to your relatives about you. And now I have come to satisfy myself. I see he did not say anything more than was true. Come and sit down, and tell me how you are, and if you have had the rest and nourishment the doctor ordered?"

"Nothing more than usual, Mrs. Kingsley, and I really do feel excessively faint at times."

"Likely, if you have not enough to eat!" burst from her visitor.

"Well, you see, the pain of my ankle takes away my appetite, and I cannot eat meat if it is all tainted, or butter if it is rancid, and dry bread chokes me; so I am afraid I do get less than the others, and—Mrs. Hopley gets very cross about my being so dainty."

"Dainty, indeed! Well, Muriel, though I did not believe all Mr. Holmes said, I took care to bring a basket of things you might like. I knew they would not go a-begging if you could not eat them. Here are a couple of nice boiled chickens and a

bit of ham, and some of our own eggs and butter, and a small loaf of our own baking, and a custard, and a bottle of elderberry wine, but mind, I brought them for you, and not for Mrs. Hopley; so you must get them smuggled to your own room. I've put a knife and fork, and a plate and cup with them."

Muriel's eyes grew moist with tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Kingsley, how good you are!" she said. It was only this morning I was wishing for some of the Eddisbury bread and butter. And for your kindness in coming so far to see me, and bringing these niceties, I do not know how to thank you sufficiently. I shall never forget it."

Mrs. Kingsley had been fumbling in one of her pannier-like pockets for a corkscrew, and now she insisted on Muriel trying the elderberry wine at once. Proceeding to question her, she discovered amongst other matters that Muriel's last letter home was unanswered, and that her grandmother did not know how much she was overworked, nor yet of her increasing debility.

"You see, I quite expected the sprain would get better soon, and I said so. Mother would have fretted so much if she thought I was really ill," was Muriel's explanation.

"She shall know before we are many days older," said Mrs. Kingsley, as she rose to take leave, suspecting that Muriel would be blamed if she stayed too long. "And here, I'll carry the basket up this flight of stairs for you," and she suited the action to the word.

"Pray don't say anything that shall alarm my mother, whatever you do, Mrs. Kingsley," cried Muriel. "I dare say I should be better if my ankle would but let me go out."

"Oh, I'll not say a word more than I should say!" answered Mrs. Kingsley, as she gave the girl a motherly kiss, and watched her crawl upstairs on her hands and knees—too feeble to do otherwise, even had she not had a lame foot. The basket, placed midway by Mrs. Kingsley, was with difficulty lifted from step to step as she went higher.

In Watergate Row Mrs. Kingsley encountered Mrs. Hopley coming out of God's Providence House with Mrs. Peover. She had a hot temper of her own had Mrs. Kingsley, and she made Mrs. Hopley feel it before they parted.

"I've been to see one of God's lambs that has been committed to your care," she began. "How shall you answer to Him for the trust you have abused? You a mother! and starve and work other people's children to death for your gain! There's Miss Holmes brought home all skin and bone, and as for that poor Muriel D'Anyer! Oh, it made my heart ache to see her!

You needn't speak; I've seen for myself, and seeing's believing. But never another stitch do you set for me, and never another hare or haunch comes from Eddisbury for your eating, Mrs. Hopley, you may take my word for it!"

And, without hearing a word in reply, she stalked on, having talked herself into a fume that hot day. Certainly, neither time, nor words, nor sentiment were wasted in the letter she despatched to Mrs. Bancroft before sitting down to her own comfortable dinner at the Blue Posts. It ran thus:—

"Dear Friend,—If you want to see your grandchild Muriel alive, you must lose no time. Between a sprained ankle, starvation, and slavery, she has hardly strength to crawl up and down stairs on hands and knees. Who's most to blame I'd be loth to say. Some folk have hearts as hard as the nether millstone. There's always a spare room at Eddisbury.

"Yours to command,

"M. KINGSLEY."

"There!" said she, as she handed it to the good-natured forester, who had borne her company, for him to fold and seal with one of the great gold seals pendant from the watch in his fob. "There! It's no use beating about the bush with Sarah Bancroft. If she's hard enough to leave the poor lass with strangers, and never come even at fair time to see how they use her, it would be waste of good ink to mince matters with soft words. I could never make out why a rich woman like her should set her grandchild to mantua making. It's my belief that sly Sam's at the bottom of it. And now be off with the letter. It's lucky the postboy goes this afternoon. I suppose you know that Post-Office Yard is just outside the Eastgate. Muriel told me it was about there she was knocked down and hurt; and, strange to say, it was that captain's son, Mr. Arthur Wynne, who picked her up and saved her from being run over. How things *do* come round, to be sure!"

"Ay, ay," said the forester, as he stood in the doorway, letter in hand. "One never does a good deed purely for God's sake but God brings it round to us some day or other;" and he was off on his good errand.

Lucinda Holmes had set the wheel in motion.

She had purposely induced her father, whose horse had carried double in taking her home, to stop for rest at the Forest House by the way; and the story of overwork and underfeeding, and Muriel's condition, lost nothing by *her* telling.

Mrs. Kingsley was a woman of action, and her natural kindness needed no prompting; she was soon on the alert, as we have seen, but she was mistaken in one of her premises. Sam had no hand in placing Muriel with either the Misses Briscoe or Mrs. Hopley. Indeed, he had remonstrated with his mother on what he called "waste of good money." She had acted solely out of mistaken kindness to the girl; it may be too credulously taking upon trust the eulogiums of proud parents displaying the accomplishments of their daughters in the one case; in the other relying too much on Lady Grosvenor's patronage of her whilom faithful dependant, and her own business knowledge of respectability and punctuality through a lapse of years, to say nothing of Mrs. Hopley's own adroit plea of motherhood. Briscoes and Hopleys stood well in the eyes of the community. How was she, in her flying visits, to look further?

Sam had, however, had a hand in holding his mother back from Chester. Since he had brought his wife home to Manchester, he had sedulously schemed to keep his mother from Eddisbury and Waverham. If she had taken her journey *viâ* Frodsham he would not have cared; but she would travel on horseback as of old, and he knew a stoppage at the Forest House and a visit to Waverham were inevitable, and every year made that more risky.

He had maintained, with much truth and apparent sincerity, that it was time she had more rest; the journey was too long for a woman of her years; that she had so well trained him, the business would not suffer in his hands, and that *he* could call on Muriel and carry messages on either side. She was willing to agree with him in part, was gratified by his filial care for her ease, and praised him for it. Still, the old furrier had no mind to be superseded; but it so *happened* unaccountably twice over that she was required at home at the very time she should have started, and Sam went to Eddisbury and Chester without her, taking Lydia in her stead, whom he left at Waverham on his way—a convenient arrangement in which Mrs. Bancroft at last acquiesced, seeing only a good son's care for his old mother, a good husband's attention to his wife, and a good daughter's desire to visit her old father.

And yet there were times when she had strange doubts and misgivings concerning Sam, and her laudations of her steady-going, businesslike son were less frequent and assured.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. BANCROFT'S BUSINESS.

SAM had certainly been as good as his word, and called to see Muriel; had taken her letters, messages, money, and other presents. Her own father had choked down his pride and condescended to ask for her at the dressmaker's; but it was always at so busy a time—the showroom was generally crowded, there was no chance of privacy, or Mrs. Hopley did not make any—and they carried back but vague impressions, which were translated into favourable ones. “Very well, though looking tired, as must needs be at fair time.” Neither had seen in her fatigue more than that of *temporary* overwork, and passing months wrought changes.

At all events, Mrs. Kingsley's letter told another tale. Stirred to the depths of her nature, the stern woman, in her counting house, set her teeth together to hide her agony and remorse. She knew not whether Mrs. Kingsley inveighed against herself or Mrs. Hopley as hard-hearted; she only felt that *she* was responsible to God and her own daughter for the sacrifice of Muriel.

People were slow to move then, but she had said, “I'll see to it,” and her prompt instructions were given in the warehouse, the workshops, the house, to workpeople, to Sam, and to Margery; lads were despatched with messages hither and thither; a valise was packed with a change of raiment; and in less than two hours Sarah Bancroft was in a postchaise, and with her Milly Hargreaves, to be set down at Hyde's Cross, a messenger charged to carry the miserable news to Broom-street as carefully and gently as possible; though it is certain the emotional girl, whose sobs were audible, was ill-calculated for the office, try as bravely as she might to hide and subdue her own agitation.

There was a stoppage at Northwich to change horses, a rest for the night with the good people of Eddisbury, where Mrs. Bancroft (looking considerably older than when we last saw her on the hearth of the Forest House) heard all that Mrs. Kingsley had to tell, and all that Lucinda Holmes—whom she found there—could reveal by way of supplement, and Lucinda was not likely to paint with dim colours.

What the self-contained, self-sufficient woman suffered in that solitary drive, of self-reproach and upbraiding, would never be known, to say nothing of her other anxieties. She had prided herself on a wondrous stroke of policy in reversing Muriel's

position of "nurse" and "lackey" in her own family, and it had ended in depriving the mother of her chief comfort, and making the gentle, too obliging girl a worse drudge to strangers, a bond slave even to the gates of death. She had taken upon herself to control events, and was learning in the bitterness of her heart that the Lord's hand was stronger than her own. His will was not to be set aside by a human will. It was the second check her self-sufficiency had had, and she bowed beneath it. "Man proposes, God disposes," was impressed upon her brain, and there were lines on her face when the chaise stopped at Mrs. Hopley's door which were not there when she started on her journey.

A small, light vehicle, merely a better sort of Welsh cart, moved away to let the chaise draw to the door, which stood ajar.

Up the stairs marched Mrs. Bancroft, with a face as rigid as a stone or her own purpose, just as Mrs. Hopley was blandly bowing out of the showroom Mrs. Parry and her niece Mrs. Griffiths, and saying apologetically, "Really, I am very sorry, but we are so very busy, and Miss D'Anyer has had so *many* visitors of late, that I cannot permit her to be called from her work for *any* friends not related to her."

"Won't you?" struck in Mrs. Bancroft; "then perhaps you will call her down for me. But stay! I'll see about it myself; maybe she's not able to come. I shall have a reckoning with you, Mrs. Hopley, when I come down. I know all about it." And the words came back over her shoulder as she trod the upper stairs with a determination to see Muriel *as she was*, without any glozing.

She did see her as she was—in a deep swoon, the window open, the tambour frame before her, the needle loose on her work, her head on a girl's shoulder, another sprinkling water on her face.

Mrs. Hopley, who had followed close at her heels to debar entrance, stood in white wrath, as one defeated and detected, and shuffled out something of "the overpowering heat."

"Overpowering cruelty!" retorted Mrs. Bancroft grimly, as she took the fainting girl in her own arms, and fanned her with her handkerchief; but not another word or look did she bestow on Mrs. Hopley. At length, consciousness and speech returning, Muriel gasped,—

"Oh, grandmother,—I am so thankful you are here.—Do not leave me."

"Leave you! no, my child, not I. You'll have to go back home with me," was the answer.

"There will have to be two words to that, Mrs. Bancroft," quoth little Mrs. Hopley stiffly; "you can have no claim on my apprentice."

"As many words as you like, Mrs. Hopley; and as for the rest, I'll see to that when Muriel here has seen her friends. I guess one is Mrs. Parry, child, by her Welsh hat and cap; and I think the other is your old teacher."

Yes, sure enough, Mrs. Griffiths and Mrs. Parry, arrested by Mrs. Bancroft's flying speech, were still waiting in the showroom when, with a painful effort and the support of her grandmother's arm, Muriel reached it. But there was barely time for greetings and introductions before Mrs. Hopley, having reduced the disorganised workroom to order, came on the scene.

Then there were not merely many words, but high words, between the two women whose word was law each in her own domain, and pacific Muriel listened trembling as she sat between her Welsh friends, with a hand clasped in that of Mrs. Griffiths.

Never had Mrs. Bancroft's affections been so wounded, never her trust and confidence so outraged, since the unhappy day when Muriel's mother went off with John D'Anyer, and her indignation was proportionate.

Never had Mrs. Hopley's citadel been so invaded; never had her authority been so set aside. Mrs. Kingsley's insolent attack in the open Row was as nothing to it. She had been made a cipher in her own workroom, and the furtive exultation on the pale faces there had stung her. Not that her conscience pricked her overmuch. Had not the high price of food compelled the richest in the land to economise its consumption? She held that she had a right to make the most out of her apprentice, and was prepared to maintain it in the face of Mrs. Bancroft's stern accusations and demand for Muriel's release.

Nay, she took the ground of the injured; asserted, "Muriel has not been worth her salt since the race week. And her foot was not injured in my service. If she had not gone gadding after a young officer she might have been well now."

Muriel clasped her hands together and cried piteously, "Oh, grandmother, that is not true!"

"It is true! His own mother, Mrs. Wynne, accused you of it in this very room," retorted Mrs. Hopley, with the sharpness of a stab; "and did not Miss Briscoe call me to order for allowing you to meet him at the theatre? and he's been sending letters to you since, you can't deny it."

Muriel flushed and paled. This was terrible. Her friends

looked confounded. Her grandmother turned towards her for an explanation.

"This was *all* the letter sent to me," said Muriel with a weary sigh, dipping into her pocket for the housewife in which it was encased. "He had providentially saved my life. I have not seen him since. Mrs. Wynne made a mistake, and so did Miss Briscoe. I went to the play with Dr. Holmes and Lucinda."

Mrs. Hopley's triumph was short-lived. She had not expected the production of the letter.

"It is the letter of a gentleman, my lass," said her grandmother, after a glance over it. "But if he had met thee or written to thee a dozen times, that would be no excuse for starvation and neglect, or working thee to death at that tambour frame instead of teaching thee thy business. Here, Mrs. Griffiths, you mind my lass, whilst I go for Dr. Prestbury; and then I'll see what a Justice of the Peace has to say about it. Ay, and what my Lady Grosvenor thinks of killing the girls who trim her gowns."

And before Mrs. Hopley could remonstrate, or intercept her, the energetic old woman was half-way down-stairs.

It was Mrs. Hopley's turn to change colour. She knew Mrs. Bancroft's resolute spirit, and that she had Lady Grosvenor's ear. Were the Lady to withdraw her patronage—and she might—half her connection would follow. And a case before a Justice! She would lose her respectability. She saw that concession was safer than exposure, and when Mrs. Bancroft returned with the well-known surgeon she was ready to come to terms.

Even then she let the kindly doctor bend his long back, his square shoulders and grave face over Muriel's swollen foot and inflamed ankle, and counsel immediate attention, bed, and good nursing before she tardily submitted. But there could be no cancelling of indentures. She would not hear of a money equivalent. Muriel must return on her recovery and serve out the last year of her term. Mrs. Hopley had a will as well as Mrs. Bancroft, and was as keen and calculating a business woman, if not more so.

Muriel cared not so long as she was free to go home then. Her heart yearned for home.

"My dear," said Mrs. Griffiths, "if the doctor thinks you could be safely removed to Wrexham, it would be a pleasure to give you every care and attention at the farm. And the pure air would set you up for the longer journey home."

"Look you, doctor, would not that be the pest for her?" suggested Mrs. Parry, "and she would be with friends."

The doctor shook his head. "The young lady is no more fit to go to Wrexham than to Manchester. This injury has been neglected too long. Let your chaise take her to the nearest inn, madam (to Mrs. Bancroft), there must be no delay, or amputation may be necessary. She must be taken to bed at once. And her foot must not be put to the ground. Come, you are a light weight, Miss, suppose I carry you to the chaise," and the worthy man, who remembered his old patient at the Misses Briscoe's, bade one of the children hanging about the door bring Miss D'Anyer's hat; and lifted her like a child. The children she was leaving looked ruefully on.

The Yacht Inn was but a few doors away; the post-boy was told to drive slowly. Mrs. Bancroft walked down the street with the doctor, Mrs. Parry and Mrs. Griffiths also following on foot, the former leading her horse. She was her own driver. The doctor lifted Muriel from the chaise himself, saw her conveyed upstairs, and then hurried away, promising to be back immediately with a cooling lotion and bandages. "Then we will see what a tonic and a good night's rest will do, with some kitchen physic to back it. We must allay the inflammation, and bolster up the system before we decide on a journey." All of which told how serious he considered the case. He was a prompt man at any time; but he was more so than ordinary, and Mrs. Bancroft saw it with renewed anxiety.

Those were not times for anyone in business to throw money away, however well-to-do. Many a commercial house that had stood its ground in the panic of 1798, had yet been shaken to its foundations, and had not altogether recovered the shock; and even cautious traders like Sarah Bancroft had felt a sense of public insecurity, and a need for caution in trade, and economy in private never before called for. But had it been otherwise, Sarah Bancroft was not the woman to throw money away, or to spend recklessly that which she had acquired with so much care and painstaking.

It spoke well for her heart that she did not calculate the cost of the postchaise, the hire and keep of horses and postillion when she undertook her journey in a hurry; and it said as much for her head, that even in her haste and distress she could call Sam's attention to the fact that it was the 4th of July, and that she could reach Chester just in the nick of time for the July Fair, which began on the morrow (the 5th), and that she might "kill two birds with one stone," if he packed up certain

goods and sent them after her as quickly as conveyance would allow.

Sam had looked blank, and rubbed his thighs irritably. "What about the October Fair?" he asked. (That was the great fair which they were wont to attend.)

"Never thee mind. I'll see to that before October comes. Do just as I tell thee now."

But long before her solitary drive had come to an end, she had (apart from her trouble and her remorse concerning Muriel) begun to calculate and reflect, and heavier than her fears for the cost of her journey were her misgivings and doubts of her substitute at Red Bank, and her fears for the business left in his sole charge in such a hurry. She might be troubling herself unnecessarily, but she had not been satisfied with Sam of late, she owned to herself. He mixed up too much with politics, and with the warlike volunteers, who were turning Manchester into a huge barracks and parade ground, and though she confessed herself "loyal as most folk, still, business was business, and soldiering was soldiering."

True, he had brought in a goodly order or two for skins to make shakos and saddlecloths, but she did not care much for business which took him so frequently away from his place of business—and his home. And although Lydia was close, and never said a word in his disfavour, she had her suspicions that all was not right under his own roof; that he kept later hours than in his bachelorhood.

It was not until the night she brought Muriel from school, when she caught Sam slinking away from observation among the other outpourings of John Shaw's Punch House, that she had a shadow of a doubt of her well-beloved and much trusted son.

Had he not stuck close to business and remained unmarried so long to please her, a plain, steadygoing tradesman, on whom she had built her hopes of keeping up the old name and connection; consorting as he did with his elders, and not with wild young bucks and dandies; and marrying at last a plain industrious farmer's daughter, instead of a high-flown miss, who would spend money faster than he could make it? Sam had indeed been a son after her own heart, fond of a sly joke now and then, but obedient and trustworthy, without a single vice; she had trained him well, and was satisfied with the results of her training. If her eyes were opened that night, she was ready to accept his plausible excuse, though she never quite closed them again.

Little matters that had formerly escaped her attention now arrested it, and there certainly was something about Sam she

could not quite understand. Whatever change there was had come on since he married, and like other mothers-in-law she attributed the change to his marriage.

There had always been a something about Lydia she could never fathom, a sort of shrinking reserve, a constraint of speech and manner as if perpetually on guard over herself. At first she set it down as the rustic awe of the country-bred young woman, but when time brought her no nearer familiarity it became a source of perplexity, and she was not fond of enigmas. And she did not care to see Maggy Blackburn ruling her son's house as if she were mistress, and bringing a lout of a lad with her, as she did when their girl was born. She wished that babe had been a lad.

Still Lydia had made Sam a good wife, there was no mistake about it, and still less that his will was law to her. She was homely, motherly, neat, industrious, kept her house in order without a maid, and never went gadding, tokens both of thrift and domesticity to be commended. But Mrs. Bancroft had an idea she kept too closely indoors for one reared in the country. The markets were close at hand, and no one ever saw Mrs. Sam except there, or at church, or in the queer but orderly rooms of the old black and white house in Toad Lane, hard at work of one sort or other. Had she not even herself told Sam he ought to take his wife out now and then to get the fresh air and see his relations, he ought not to have married to let her lose her fresh country roses shut up in a box, as if he was ashamed of her. He had answered: "Lydia's shy of town folk, she hasn't been used to them or their ways," and for a long while this had passed muster, Lydia did seem so afraid of his relatives, especially her mother-in-law. Well, she knew she was hard and brusque, and Lydia had not got used to it. But when she had dropped in at unexpected, far apart times and seasons, either when collecting her rents, or coming from church or the D'Anyers, and invariably found her alone, and more than once in tears over the hose she was knitting, or the babe she was nursing, with the place as bright and inviting as hands could make it, she began to think there might be someone to blame besides Lydia; and to wonder where Sam spent his Sundays and his after-business hours. She even forgave her for having Maggy Blackburn about her, since her new home must be dull after the farm, and Maggy could bring her all the news of Waverham, and it was this caused her to assent so readily to Lydia going with Sam on the autumn journey. Indeed, she had more than once taken him to task and said there was no place for a married man like his own hearth.

True, Sam had always an excuse or a reason, and his reason was generally "business," whether he was with John D'Anyer, or with his military and volunteer friends, until at last she had told him that his "professed diligence in business was somewhat overdone, she would like him to keep as close to the workshop and the counting house now he was his own master as he had done before, there was as much need."

Thus it was that her absence from Manchester and the furriery, in those critical times, was weighted with extra anxiety. Her forebodings came on afresh when Mr. Prestbury declared Muriel unlikely to leave the bed hastily prepared for her, for some days, and in need of constant care and attention. She began to think she had made a miscalculation, and that all her trade provisions would end in extra cost. She might almost as well send back her furs unopened; there would be no leaving Muriel to the care of the busy hostess or waiters at fair time; and when the fair was over, the chances of trade would be over too.

She had her misgivings, too, about the business at home left so hurriedly in the care of her son and partner. Keen as was Sam at a bargain, fond as he was of money, close as he had stuck to the workshops and counting house before his marriage, the change which had come over him since recurred to her with fresh force.

It added now to the anxiety with which she contemplated her coming watch by Muriel's side at the inn, instead of driving over to Eddisbury at once and leaving her there in charge of Mrs. Kingsley and Dr. Holmes whilst she came back to buy and sell in Chester; as had been her intention.

Here was another thing over which she had no control, and it worried her. Yet she was not the less ready to own that she had "just come in the nick of time," and accept it as a Providential circumstance that the July Fair had brought Muriel's two Welsh friends to Chester, and to Mrs. Hopley's at the same juncture.

It was a satisfaction to have met them so opportunely, and for once in her life she was content to have someone at hand to "see to it," in her stead, she felt so unstrung.

The tension upon iron nerves may be too great, and hers had been overstrained. She did not faint, she had never fainted in her life, but when she heard the doctor's decision, she sank into a chair within an ace of it. Someone brought her a glass of brandy and water, someone who saw she had need of a fillip. She could not be sure whether it was Mrs. Griffiths or Mrs. Parry.

It was a tacit surrender of her own sufficiency when she stood aside, or sat down and watched strangers perform for Muriel those offices which she would have felt called upon to perform at any cost to herself, had they not been present to proffer service.

It was Mrs. Griffiths who assisted Muriel to the great four-post bed; Mrs. Griffiths who waited upon Mr. Prestbury when he applied his lotion and swathed the tender and unsatisfactory member in wet bandages.

It was likewise the kind friend of her girlhood, more matronly but otherwise unchanged, who stooped down over Muriel—when, pressing her white lips close, she winced at his touch—and whispered to her words of sustaining power and comfort in the language of the Book which had been Muriel's treasury, whence she had drawn her patience and her hope, the Book Sarah Bancroft had begun to study so late in life. The words fell from Mrs. Griffiths' lips like the cooling drops from a fountain of sweet waters, and did much to soothe Muriel's pain and tranquilise her spirit, disturbed alike by the accusation and the altercation about herself at Mrs. Hopley's; and the suggested possibility of amputation.

And when Sarah Bancroft's business cares strove audibly with the necessity for nursing her debilitated grandchild, it was Rachel Griffiths who relieved her dilemma, by arranging for Mrs. Parry to go back to Wrexham and her boys without her, expressing her own intention to remain with her young friend in case Mr. Prestbury should apply leeches to the ankle on the morrow, as he feared might be necessary, and in fact until she was fit for removal to Wrexham or elsewhere. She had an impression that the hard-featured woman would rather irritate than soothe the sick girl, whose mind needed rest as well as her body.

It was Mrs. Parry who, with many a "Look you!" and "Pless my heart!" revealed that the dress Muriel had sat up night and day to embroider for Mrs. Wynne (of which Lucinda Holmes had given a full account), had indirectly been the means of laying Mrs. Wynne herself up with rheumatic fever.

"And it wass serve her right, to dress like a young girl, look you!"

"Oh, Mrs. Parry, you would not say so," expostulated Muriel from her pillow, "if you knew what rheumatism is. My mother suffers from it dreadfully."

"May pe, put if she threw off her warm skirts, and did put on a thin gown, and did pare all her arms and her neck at a pall, then it would serve her right too, look you!"

"My mother never did *that*, I am sure. I believe she got wet through one day. I never was told how," answered Muriel innocently. But her words sent a shaft of pain through her grandmother's breast. Was that wetting Ellen's fault or her own? Was anyone "served right" in that case? She was glad Muriel knew no more.

Rest, lotion, bandages, nourishment, and friendly sympathy did as much for Muriel as the doctor's anodyne. She slept long and tranquilly. Though leeches were necessary, there was no more said of amputation, Muriel had settled that. The inflammation subsided, and she remained recumbent by Mr. Prestbury's command. She was patient; Rachel Griffiths was all that a kind and gentle nurse should be. And there being no interdict of speech, there was much to hear and tell on both sides. On Mrs. Griffiths' part, of her husband, her boys, and the years which might elapse before she and the captain met again. But there was no whining or complaint in her tone. Whatever she might feel, she submitted to the absence of her husband as she had done to that of her lover, or her father before him, as to the inevitable, leaving the future in hands Divine. She made no parade of her anxiety or distress. And in the aftertime Muriel remembered this.

I have said little of the war fever that was raging through Europe, and had spread its contagion to our own land; but it was on that epidemic Mrs. Bancroft had counted for trade during the July Fair. The bom-bom of the drum, and toot-a-toot of the fife, were heard in every town and village where idlers or patriots might be ready for enlistment. Volunteer corps were enrolling and arming; Sheffield and Birmingham were noisily and grimly at work on swords and muskets. The wheels and looms of Yorkshire and Wiltshire were humming and clacking to furnish cloth; madder and indigo had possession of the Lancashire dye pits; army tailors and saddlers stitched and pressed their work in hot haste, for even the women went into uniform—at least the loyal ladies who presented colours to the various new troops wore military coatees over their short bodices.

And as the volunteers loyally equipped themselves, the demand for mink, bearskin, and sheepskin for shakos and housings was brisk and general. Not alone on Chester, but on the Welsh and Irish traders did Sarah Bancroft rely. The presence of Mrs. Griffiths set her at liberty, and as she had calculated, the large bales of dressed skins Sam had duly despatched to the Manchester Hall were exchanged for piles of flannel or linen, or hard cash before the fair was over; and the old dame took credit to herself

for the smart way in which she had turned her unforeseen journey to account.

She did not forget to thank Mrs. Griffiths for the kind and Christian-like devotion to Muriel which had released her to more congenial duties, and so helped to make a fortunate hit of a misfortune; and when Mrs. Parry came for her niece on the Saturday, the market day and the last of the fair, the little light cart carried off a load of toy drums, trumpets, and swords, gingerbread soldiers and sailors gloriously gilt, for the boys, and rugs for winter use in the farm, which were pressed on their acceptance with a mingling of graceful goodwill and independence.

And Rachel Griffiths carried away with her not only Muriel's grateful thanks for true and womanly service in the present, but the assurance that her precepts and her example in the past had been set up by her loving pupil as a lamp to light her on the rough path she was treading. And if the pair parted with tears, there was a rainbow shining through them.

CHAPTER XX.

SEEN AND HEARD.

I HAVE said elsewhere that Muriel had been carried away like a leaf on a stream, the stream of her grandmother's strong will. But let it not be supposed she was passive from the weakness of her nature, but from its very strength. Shallow waters chafe at every pebble, the deep and strong glide on without a ripple on the surface. There were unsuspected forces in her breast with which she had wrestled many a time and oft; and but for the softening influence of Rachel Williams at one crisis of her life, they might have overcome all her own mother had taught of cheerful obedience and patient endurance. She had found life at Mrs. Hopley's hard and uncompromising, but she looked hopefully through the vista of years for her release, and had picked up some crumbs of comfort by the way. She had saved Lucinda Holmes from the reckless course Matilda Parkes had taken towards destruction; and through all her life Lucinda would bless her for it. She had won her way to the hearts of Mrs. Hopley's children; dressed rag dolls for the girls, made balls and marble bags for the boys, watched by their sick beds through the

hours of the night, carried them with her into the fields and lanes, and told them tales by the way on Sunday afternoons in the slack season. Or she had cheered up their dull and crowded attic at bedtime with that marvellously sweet voice of hers, and they had crowded round her eager for "more." She had brightened her own life as she sweetened theirs, and she had her reward in the love they bore her.

Young heads of all sizes had peered through or over the balustrades as she was borne away; sobbing "good-byes" were called to her, and Muriel was sensible she had done something more at Mrs. Hopley's than make dresses or embroider robes, was leaving some little hearts that were sorry for her, sorry to lose her, even for a time.

The fact was, one listener had carried the word "amputation" to the others, and the horror that Miss D'Anyer's foot was to be "cut off" was strong upon them, and not to be overcome. They talked of it, cried over it, dreamed of it.

They need not have been afraid. Muriel had listened and decided within herself that it should not be "cut off;" and so she told Mr. Prestbury when he at the inn a second time adverted to the possible necessity for using the knife; as doctors of the time were rather inclined to do.

"Well, sir," she said emphatically, "if I cannot go back to my father and mother with all my limbs, I am willing to die. They would get over the shock of my death, I have been away from them so long; but my father would never recover the shock of a maimed daughter stumping about the house," and a long-drawn sigh came from the depths of memory.

She was right in her conclusions. Her cropped head had been an eyesore to her father, and she knew it. The knowledge had been a grief to her.

The doctor had possibly sounded a false alarm partly to bring Mrs. Hopley to reason, partly to convince Mrs. Bancroft that immediate removal was impossible, and it may be to emphasise his own skill in curing without so desperate a remedy. He had, however, faith in his own resources. And they sufficed.

Indeed, so successful had he been that though he shook his head and said it was "hazardous" and "premature," he could not on the Saturday morning which closed the fair deny the feasibility of removing his patient to Manchester if done with care, easy travelling, and short stages. Mrs. Bancroft had not dismissed the postchaise in which she had travelled, when she sent the Northwich postboy back with his horses; and she had no difficulty in finding other post horses. (When Arthur Wynne

had ridden away with his servant behind him it was on post horses to be changed at the next posting station.)

Muriel was glad to exchange the hot, stifling, gloomy double-bedded room at the Yacht, with its heavy hangings and small transome window, for a seat in the postchaise, though her foot had to be stretched out on the seat before her. And she was glad to see four or five of the young Hopleys on the watch for her, boys and girls from fourteen to six, and to exchange good-byes and nod back to them as they waved their hands to her. The windows were open, the afternoon sun was shining, and she was going home. Home! the word seemed written in sunbeams on every beam of every gable in the ancient street, on the irregular balustrades of the Rows as they were left behind. The fresh clear air, the blue sky, seemed to be a part of her gladness, and but for the children there was not a creature she cared to leave behind, not a soul to care for her going. She almost forgot her still aching foot in her gladness, and leaned back happy but not talkative. If the reflection that she was bound to return to her task mistress would obtrude, she thrust it into the background, and left it behind when they were once fairly out of Watergate-street, and there was no fear of Mrs. Hopley stopping the chaise and demanding her stay there and then.

It was a market as well as a fair day; the streets were full of people, and the recruiting sergeant had taken advantage of the opportunity. At the Cross they passed a party of soldiers with a file of rustics in their charge who had closed their hands on the king's shilling, and with gay cockades and flying streamers followed the lure of the fife and drum. The music disturbed the horses, and the postillion had to urge them past with whip and spur. Then they set off with a rush so sudden that Muriel was startled, and both were pitched forward.

Looking out involuntarily through the front windows of the chaise, she caught a momentary glimpse of a face she knew, above the parapet of the wide Eastgate; but before she could tell her grandmother that she had seen Arthur Wynne, the flying horses had carried them beyond the Bars, and along Foregate—scattering the people right and left—only slackening speed when Chester was left behind, and they were far out on the clearer highway beyond Boughton milestone, between green hedges, where the only streamers were those of the dog-rose and the scented honeysuckle.

"Are you sure it was Lieutenant Wynne?" the elder woman asked.

"Quite. I could not mistake him; and I think those soldiers

recruiting at the Cross wore the same uniform, only they had tall blue caps like mitres, with the Prince of Wales's feathers worked in front."

"Ah, the Welsh Fusiliers! So they were, my lass! I wish I had seen him, or that we had not gone flying past at such headlong speed. The horses had quite run away with us, it is well there was no accident. They have given my old bones a shaking, and will not have done your foot any good. But I am more sorry they took fright then, because I would have liked to have a word or two with the young gentleman."

"And so," thought Muriel with a sigh, "should I. But perhaps it is as well as it is, one never knows," and she sighed again unconsciously, lapsing into silence, in which thought and memory were busy with her "true friend, Arthur Wynne." Somehow she was not *quite* so glad that she was hurrying away since she had seen him. She wondered how long he had been in Chester, and if it was possible he had recognised her.

Her grandmother, too, had sunk into silence. It might be she was calculating her gains during the fair, or it might be that the jolting and rattling of the chaise (the best of roads were bad) inclined more to meditation than speech.

Suddenly she broke abruptly on Muriel's reverie.

"Do you mean to say you never heard how your mother got her wetting?" and her voice sounded strangely hard and stern.

Muriel looked wonderingly in her face.

"Never!"

"Then I'll tell you; and let it serve as a warning. I did it. Your mother was my youngest, and my darling, the pride of my widowed life, yet—I *did it*! When she was barely sixteen, and I first heard of her *clandestine marriage* through your father's blustering demand for his wife, I drenched her with the water in which she was washing lace, and bade her 'begone.' Wet as she was, without another word, he took her away. I never saw her again until after you were born,—you need not look so petrified, Muriel! If that wetting caused her pain in every limb, her own secret and undutiful act stung me to wrath and brought it on herself."

And the dry, grinding tone in which this was said sounded as if the old woman would be ready to do the same again under like provocation.

"Poor mother!" murmured Muriel behind the hands in which her tearful face was hid.

"Poor mother!" echoed Mrs. Bancroft, angrily, "and what of me? Was not I the poor mother robbed of the child on whom I

had lavished coin like water? Treacherously robbed in cruel silence and secrecy. It came on me like a thunderbolt, and the storm fell on both. Was I to blame? I trow not. No child has a right to contract marriage without a parent's sanction. What do young folk know of character or habits? They meet and fall in love—calf love, and if no elders intervene marry and make fools of themselves. Take care, girl, you make no such mistake; I should never forgive you if you did after this caution."

"There is no fear of that, grandmother; I am not in love yet, and no one is in love with me. I will let you know when there is," and Muriel's smile chased away her tears.

"That's right, child, see you do!" and the wrinkled fingers of the mitted brown hand stroked caressingly the thin white one lying on the outstretched knee.

I have set my face against premature marriages," she went on; "The hottest love is soonest cold, and those who have neither patience nor constancy to wait, will belike show little patience or constancy afterwards. And the courtship that dare not ask the blessing of father or mother is a something to be ashamed and afraid of. Thank God! I had one dutiful child who stuck by his old mother, and was not too wise to take her advice and wait till he was old and sensible enough to take charge of another's life and happiness. There was nothing secret or clandestine about *Sam's* courtship; though I sometimes think I kept them waiting rather longer than was any need. Lydia was a steady lass, and makes him a notable, thrifty wife; and Sam's lost nothing by his obedience, I can tell you. If he only keeps steady and sticks to business, he's a made man."

Some of her recent misgivings about her son must have recurred to her, for her brows suddenly contracted, and she fell into a brown study. Muriel herself was so lost in wonder at the drift of the conversation and her grandmother's unwonted burst of confidence, that she had no words for her entangled thoughts, in which the rights and wrongs of her mother and grandmother were inextricably confused. Now and then she shifted her position to ease her lame foot, and make a casual remark as they passed through town or village in their route, but the wheels were more voluble than either of their tongues. Indeed, the rattle and shaking of the vehicle made conversation a strain, and induced fatigue.

They had left Tarvin behind, but had not reached Kelsall, and so were not yet within the bounds of Delamere, and the dark green woods of the Old Pale of Eddisbury looming through the twilight mists high above all to promise rest and welcome, were

only seen in anticipation, when, as abruptly as if there had been no break in her own communings or their colloquy, Mrs. Bancroft again laid her aged hand on Muriel's with kind impressiveness, and said :

" I thought, my lass, you had maybe set your fancy on that lieutenant, and it was best to give you a bit of a caution ; for he's a likely lad to catch a girl's fancy, and soldiers are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and—— "

" Oh, grandmother, how could you think—? " interrupted Muriel like a gasp, the colour mounting to her pale cheeks unseen in the evening shade.

" Well, well, I hope I had no right to *think* ; for Arthur Wynne comes of a proud stock, and that mother of his would consider his blood defiled if he mated with a tradesman's child ; and not all the blood of the Masseys, and Stanleys, and the D'Anyer of Cressy to boot—of which your father boasts so much in his cups—can do away with the fact that he and his father got their living and made their money in trade, though it's little enough *your* father has made—worse luck ; so you'd best not let your fancy go astray, my lass, that's all."

Muriel murmured something of his being " only a friend."

" Ay ; he may be, as you say, only a friend, but friends of his class are best at a distance. I'm glad we left him behind."

Muriel had the clue now to her grandmother's extraordinary tirade—the figure seen for a brief moment above the Eastgate. A clue had been supplied to something more—the unsuspected mystery of her own heart. For a moment its pulses seemed to stand still, then they went on beating, but to a new tune for which she had not yet a name. She had discovered that her " true friend, Arthur Wynne," was more to her than a mere friend ; and the discovery kept her silent. She could *not* tell *that* to her grandmother.

Presently her grandmother broke out, as abruptly as before, " Hast heard from thi cousin Milly of late ? "

" Not since Christmas, when she sent me word of the grand doings at the Grange," answered Muriel, wondering why she asked.

" Ay," responded the questioner, " thy Aunt Bent's o'er fond of fooling money away in dinners and dances ! And so many poor folk starving too ! I've no patience. And now that all the world is fighting mad, she never has the redcoats out of the house. It cost enough for Will's commission and uniform ; and now Joe has turned volunteer. She might want to get rid of all her sons. As if a cotton spinner's sons had not something better before them."

"Milly said that Bob would soon be out of his articles," put in Muriel, to change the subject.

"Ay, and a pretty lawyer he'll make, half his time dangling after Milly, and the other half hunting or shooting. And what had Milly to say about *him*?"

"Oh, only that he danced a minuet with her, and a new country dance called 'Haste to the Wedding.'"

"Humph! 'Haste to the Wedding,' indeed! Lads and lasses are all ready to dance to that tune, but most haste, less speed, Muriel. And it's not the tune for either Milly or Bob for many a year to come. I don't care to put my fingers in other folk's hot pies, or I should bid James Hargreaves look after Milly."

"Why, grandmother?" and Muriel opened wide her lovely eyes.

"Why?—well, because the lass is always poring over rubbishy novels and love-sick romances, till she's as silly and sentimental as any Amanda or Clarissa she finds in them; and your sister Marion's not a bit the better. Ah! you've something to thank your old grandmother for, if only keeping you clear of such nonsense. I'm glad you are not one of the silly girls who fall in love if a fine fellow only looks at them. There's plenty of time, Muriel, *plen—ty* of time!" and again the old woman patted the young one's hand.

But the young one answered never a word though her heart beat rapidly, and again sent its crimson to her brow,

They were at Eddisbury. The chaise stopped, lights flashed to and fro, and in the hearty greeting of the forester and his wife Muriel's unwonted and rapidly fading bloom escaped notice.

They were in the great hall, still in the bustle of reception; Mrs. Bancroft helping Mr. Kingsley to place Muriel for rest and ease among cushions on the oaken settle to which he had borne her, like a child, in his brawny arms.

"Mrs. Kingsley, do you want me?" was shouted from one of the side passages.

Mrs. Bancroft pricked up her ears. "Goodness! That was our Sam's voice!"

"No! no!" cried Mrs. Kingsley, hurrying down the passage on the left to keep someone back.

"Your Sam? Why, we have not seen him for months," said the forester. "It's only a poor, neglected lad my wife's taken pity on."

"I could have sworn it was our Sam," replied the old furrier, but she did not ask to see the lad; and though she gave Muriel Sunday's rest and Monday's at Eddisbury, while she made her

purchases of skins from the forester, and drove to Waverham to collect her rents and inspect her property, she went back to Red Bank without seeing him. Sarah Bancroft thought she had made a discovery of Muriel's secret; she little thought how close she had been to the discovery of a greater one, the dread of which made two people in Manchester quake in their shoes; and put the good-natured Kingsleys in a quandary.

A figure seen on a city wall—an empty voice in a dim passage!

There was, of course, a brief stoppage at Northwich, where horses and postboy had to be exchanged, but the stoppage was at the door of Dr. Holmes' and not at the door of the inn; and *there* the exchange had to be made, for so Sarah Bancroft willed, and she was too old and too regular a customer to be offended. People who put up at an inn once or twice a year in those untravelled days were known and respected. Host and hostess attended to the wants and comforts of their customers, the inn servants kept their places until they were as well known as the swinging sign, and as attentive as master or mistress. But the homeliness and home-welcome of the old country posting house are things of the far past; having been lost in the whiz and fizz of steam. Railways are not unmitigated blessings.

At the doctor's there was rest, and a luncheon of bread and cheese, gooseberry pie, and home-brewed ale, though the doctor was out. Lucinda and her mother were at their wits' end to entertain their impromptu guests as they wished, and were quite in a flurry of regret that they had no better fare to set before them. "As if it matters," said Muriel, "when the hearty welcome is here; and it is for us to apologise for taking you by storm, but I thought you would not mind it, and I could not have walked here from the inn."

"Mind it! I'm delighted! But now tell us how you got away, and all about it."

Lucinda was in a state of great excitement and rejoicing at the "triumph over old Hopley," though her joy was damped to hear that Muriel was bound to return. And she was most desirous that they should remain until her father came. But he was gone on an uncertain errand, and Mrs. Bancroft was eager to get home. So, it may be, as a substitute for her father, Lucinda introduced his assistant, Asa Booth, a sober-looking young fellow, who brought with him the savour of the drugs he was compounding, and who seemed glad to escape to his pestle and mortar, somewhat as if he felt he had been "on view." And Lucinda's whispered "What do you think of him?" to Muriel did seem to bear some such interpretation.

Mrs. Bancroft was fidgety to be off. The horses were brought round from the Unicorn, and Muriel, leaning on Lucinda, limped to the door. A tall, thin fellow, with sharp ferrety eyes, was busied putting the horses in the chaise. As he raised his head from buckling a strap, Muriel had a good view of him, and his face seemed known to her.

"Who is that man?" she asked Lucinda; "I have either seen him before or someone resembling him."

"Oh, that's one of Maggy Blackburn's sons, and his brother's as like him as two peas."

"Ah, that's it! I thought I had seen the face somewhere. It was Maggy Blackburn's."

"Yes," added the other, under her breath, as if afraid a whisper would reach his ears, "it's a face to remember, and not pleasantly. If I were the landlord of the Unicorn, I'd have none of him hanging about the stables, cleaning harness and conveyances and horsing them. If a linchpin is loosened or a strap cut half through and blacked over, it isn't found out maybe till the people are far enough in the forest."

"Well!" and the listener caught her breath.

"Well! why, don't you know that the high road to Chester goes round with a great sweep? Long-legged fellows like that running straight across can be ready to take advantage of a breakdown, and if one's left behind to be sworn to, who's to be sure about the other. That's the way Captain Wynne's carriage had been served, father says."

Part of this conversation had been held whilst Mrs. Bancroft disputed the man's demand for bringing the horses round, and Lucinda settled her friend comfortably in the chaise, her closing remark being, "Don't you be afraid; you're going the other way, and Asa is giving a sharp squint at everything. He's very clever is Asa."

Muriel smiled; she had heard of Asa, and his cleverness, many a time before. Lucinda acknowledged the smile with a laughing good-bye, and retreated to make way for Mrs. Bancroft.

There was a fresh start, another set of associations to occupy their minds and conversation as they left milestones and turnpike gates behind. But through all, that voice heard at the Forest House seemed to come back to Sarah Bancroft's ear; and that figure seen above the Eastgate was more vividly present to Muriel than her companion imagined.

This time Muriel was taken direct to her own home, and the chain across the end of Broom-street was removed to allow the passage of the chaise. John D'Anyer himself helped his daughter

to alight, and lent her his support to a seat. He left a kiss on her brow, and said he was "glad to have her home again," before he resigned her to her mother with moist eyes to mingle tears of mutual thankfulness and affection. Sisters, and Betty the maid, all came round her with their greetings, and Muriel felt once more she was "at home."

John D'Anyer had returned to the chaise, more than usually courteous to his mother-in-law. He thanked her for her care of Muriel, offered to recoup the cost of her journey, and begged she would alight there.

His attention and offers of repayment were doubtless gratifying; her prompt "I'll see thah don't," was said with a smile; but the old woman went on in the vehicle to Hyde's Cross, whence it came, and having settled her long bill out of her long purse, with as long a face, carried her handbag over to her son's house just as Lydia was clearing away her tea things. Her little girl was playing with a kitten on the home-made hearthrug.

"Where's Sam?" was the first salutation.

"Oh, Mrs. Bancroft!"—Lydia never said mother—"How you made me jump! I thought it was Sam coming in. He said I had better not wait tea, he might be late paying wages as you were away. I'll soon have a cup ready for you—and how did you leave all the folk at Waverham?" There was a curiously-anxious expression about Lydia's mouth and eyes as she put the question; but her mother-in-law had lifted the little one into her lap to be kissed and treated to gilt-gingerbread cakes from those capacious pannier-like pockets of hers, and saw only the child.

"Oh, they were all pretty hearty. The war doesn't seem to be a bad thing for the farmers from all I hear. Your father looks fat and jolly enough. He sent his love to you, and a cheese, and some fruit. The hamper's across the road. I thought Sam might fetch it."

"Sam fetch it?" The ejaculation was involuntary, and not to be recalled.

"Sam fetch it!" echoed the old woman tartly; "why not? It's an ill ass that won't carry its own provender. If John D'Anyer's too proud to do a turn of the sort, our Sam's not. Not he."

Lydia had been moving about preparing tea for her mother-in-law. There had been a wistful look in her face as she asked for news from Waverham, but it had settled into stolid impenetrability as she set the tea "to draw," and buttered the brown bread for her unexpected visitor.

She was filling up the small teapot from the kettle on the bright bar, when Mrs. Bancroft said with customary abruptness:—

"I got quite a start at Kingsley's; some lad or other called out to Mrs. Kingsley from the passage, and I could almost have sworn it was Sam's voice!"

Somehow, either the teapot or the kettle slipped, and the boiling water, splashing on the bright fender, sent the kitten squealing away from the hearth, and brought an angry cat flying into the room in maternal alarm. The mischance and the snarl of the cat diverted attention from Lydia's ashen face, or the strange voice in which she asked: "What lad? Did you see him?"

"No! What are you doing? It's well I had the child on my lap, or you would have scalded her instead of the kitten. Poor pussy."

In the commotion the disturbing voice was forgotten, and after tea, which comprehended also a collop of hung beef, Sarah Bancroft relieved Mrs. Sam of her presence.

When Sam came home about nine o'clock, in an ill-humour at having been detained to go over the accounts with his mother before he left Red Bank, he found a hamper in the kitchen, and his wife with her head on the round snap-table in tears.

"What's the matter now?" he cried, as he threw down his hat. "I suppose it was with some of your confounded nonsense you scalded the poor kitten, and set my mother wondering what made you so starty. And now, you're blubbing as usual."

"Oh, Sam, I could not help it! I thought your mother had found it all out, and my heart fair came into my mouth!"

"Came into your mouth indeed! I wish it had stuck there," quoth her polite husband, rubbing his breeches knees irritably. "You'll let it out and spoil all one of these days, if you're not more careful."

"Oh, Sam, I can't help it, I can't indeed! Do tell your mother. I don't think she's so very hard. And the secret is killing me. It is, Sam." She had come close to him, and dropping on her knees laid her hands and head upon his arm appealingly.

He shook her off with an oath—this excellent son—this steady husband—"Do you want to bring us to ruin? Do you want to be turned out of house and home? If you dare to breathe a syllable to a living soul, by heaven—I'll kill you!" and taking up his hat again he went out of the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNKNOWN ATTRACTIONS.

MURIEL thought that time had run faster in Manchester than in Chester during her long absence. Her life had been monotonous, her growth from girlhood to womanhood wearisome until the last grand leap. At home all seemed changed. The chaise rattled over paved roadways; oil lamps hung suspended from the walls, or were mounted on wooden posts to light the streets when night should come; and those streets, she knew them not; whole blocks of old houses had vanished, new red brick ones had sprung up, and change was everywhere.

The whiteness of her father's head was nothing new—it had been white at thirty, but the hair must have retreated from the temples, his lofty brow seemed so much loftier, and certainly there was a round spot on the crown from which the hair had fallen altogether; it was but the size of a shilling, but it was there—and he not forty. Yet he was erect and commanding as of old, and Muriel fancied he was more imperative and exacting. She fancied too that she saw a line or two of silver under her mother's cap, and surely her gentle face was growing thin and angular at the cheekbones like her Grandmother Bancroft's, of whose energy she certainly partook, though her will was dominated by a stronger one, and if she rebelled it was kept within herself—never shown. She noticed too that whilst her father's attire was jaunty and dandyish as of yore, her mother's had toned down into primitive simplicity. A white kerchief of thin muslin in regular folds covered her neck with matronly modesty, whilst the plain half-high bodice under which lay the kerchief corners was not the narrow strip worn by fashionables like Mrs. Wynne and the material was of homely stuff.

Very different were the two stylish young ladies who bent over her, and in whom Muriel could scarcely realise the Anna and Marion who had been so captious over the embroidered portrait then confronting her upon the wall; for black-eyed Marion in her sixteenth year had shot up taller than light-complexioned Anna in her eighteenth; and lovely little Sara was "little" no longer, though she still wore a schoolgirl's frock and pinafore, from which Marion had only been freed on account of her premature growth.

"I can scarcely believe my eyes," she said, "you are all so grown, and cousin Milly—and—surely that is not Bob Bent with you, Milly?"

"Yes, cousin Muriel, I'm Bob, come to shake hands with you,

to show I don't bear malice. I dare say I was rough and rude when you came from that fine school with a cropped head, but as Milly will tell you, I don't bear malice. I've forgiven myself long ago—so shake hands on it."

Muriel laughed, asked after her uncle, then about his brothers.

"Oh, Joe, and Charles, you'll hear their martial footsteps in the passage ere long. I came in advance lest the warriors should cut the limb of the law out. You'll have quite an army of cousins to defend you when the French come, won't she, Milly? But if they do, my girls, I don't know but I might lay down the goosequill and take up a gun myself; I am not a bad shot at rabbit or pigeon, and I shouldn't mind having a pop at a Mounseer or two, without any malice prepense, I assure you."

He had seen the grave look in Muriel's face. "Hush, Bob," said she, "I don't like to hear you speak so lightly of human lives."

"My simple cousin, where have you lived all these years? We are all bloodthirsty manslayers now, every man jack of us. If a man goes to court his sweetheart, he talks of swords and pistols instead of love and kisses, doesn't he, Milly?"

"How should I know?" answered Milly, blushing rosy red. Muriel looked from one to the other, and fancied she saw a glance of intelligence pass between them. It gave point to Robert's frequent references to Milly, which she had at first taken as a bit of his badinage.

She soon found that his jests had matter in them. Of the many cousins who walked in and out so frequently, two held His Majesty's commission, and more were volunteers. Even her father—coming in from the warehouse, or the Exchange, or from his club at John Shaw's (which still existed under John Shaw's law, though the ex-dragon had succumbed to a stronger law than his own, and lay under a coffin lid), or from the neighbouring Seven Stars, where country carriers and buyers put up,—talked more of French politics and war news than of the prices of goods, unless to decry the war as ruinous to trade and credit. And, indeed, the closing of French ports against our goods, and the interference with American trade, had made French policy a vital question with our manufacturers, and that something new within Muriel's own breast made all the warlike preparations, of which she heard so much, of vital import to her.

The letter she had sent home with so much difficulty had accounted for her accident and her rescue; and now she found two sisters and cousin Milly alike eager to ply her with feminine questions about the gallant young officer, what he was like, what

he said when she saw him ; did he not call to see her ? intermingled with others on that first meeting in Delamere Forest when they were all children, and comments on his romantic re-appearance, which showed that they had indulged in a class of sentimental reading from which she had happily been excluded.

So long as Anna and Marion confined their observations to the bravery of Arthur Wynne, and his providential appearance at a critical juncture, she was willing to assent ; but no sooner did they branch off into the probabilities of a mutual attachment, which she slyly kept to herself, then she felt it time to check their assumptions, the knowledge of all that was in her own heart making it the more imperative. Maidenly shame prohibited the confession of a love unsought ; a love she dared scarcely avow to herself.

She still lay on the sofa, far from strong, and unable to use her foot.

"Hush, my dears ! What would mother think if she heard you ? What would Lieutenant Wynne think ? Encourage him to call at Mrs. Hopley's ! You forget that it was not my father's house, and that I was there only a mantua maker's apprentice, and he the nephew of a baronet."

"I hope you did not tell him so," cried black-headed Marion, in whom all the father's pride seemed to have centred.

"Indeed I did. It was my duty to do so."

"Indeed it was *not*. If Grandmother Bancroft chose to disgrace us all with binding you to that woman, there was no reason to publish to strangers that John D'Anyer's daughter was stitching dresses amongst common workwomen." And handsome Marion drew her tall form up proudly, and resentfully, as if *she* had felt Muriel's avocation a disgrace.

Anna held her peace. She had her own reasons ; *she* had friends who were *not* aristocratic, and of whom the family knew nothing ; at least nothing more than in relation to their work, for they were fustian cutters ; for whose frame and knives, John D'Anyer himself found frequent occupation.

Muriel flushed. She had long felt her bondage a double grievance, unable to penetrate her grandmother's motives, or her father's acquiescence ; but she was not a grumbler. Her mother had early impressed upon her that she was required "to do her duty in that state of life unto which it pleased God to call her." Miss Williams had enforced and exemplified the doctrine, and she had been a faithful disciple. But to say that she had been satisfied with her position would be untrue. Marion's remark brought her face to face with the subject once more, and not pleasantly.

Presently she answered: "If you think it such a disgrace, there was all the more reason Lieutenant Wynne should be informed. But you cast a reflection on father when you say so, for I could not have been apprenticed without his consent," and her head went back wearily on the sofa cushion.

"Well, for my part, I don't see the disgrace," here interposed Anna, who was often to be found in the warehouse, helping the "putter-out," and, it may be partly for that reason, was her father's favourite. "There's no disgrace in honest work. I think the weaver's as good as his master, and I don't think that lieutenant a bit better for being a baronet's nephew. What good has father's family pride done us?"

Marion, quite eighteen months her junior, put up her hands, long and slender in accord with her figure. "Oh, you revolutionist! Where did you pick up such notions? You had better not let father hear you!"

Ellen D'Anyer walked into the room. The excited flush on Muriel's face caught her eye. She smoothed down the brown hair, once more abundant, and saying, "Come, girls, leave Muriel alone. You are neglecting your own work and disturbing her;" sent them before her, the one to help the maid upstairs, the other to assist her with cookery in the kitchen.

"Mother," said Muriel from the sofa, "there is no reason why my hands should be idle because my foot requires rest. I am quite well enough now to use my needle. Bring your workbag and let me darn the stockings. I can fancy it is lace. Let me do *something* to help you. It is so long since I did, and I think you need rest more than I."

In truth she did. She was worn with many anxieties, with sleepless nights and careful days. John D'Anyer had felt the commercial pressure, but the closer he was pressed, the more difficult it was to meet his payments to the hour, the more lavish was his expenditure abroad. It was *his* expedient to preserve his credit. His wife saw this with pain; expostulation, she knew of old, was worse than useless. Interference only drove him to excess. His own father had remonstrated, but the old and now feeble man had only incensed his son, and there was a coolness set up which told against John in the long run. All Ellen could do was to economise in the household. She dismissed one maid, retaining only Betty, and told Sara to make the most of school, for she would soon have to leave it. Her days and nights were full of apprehensions, whether her husband was away on a journey or at home; in the former case she went into the warehouse from time to time to keep an eye on clerks and salesmen,

and altogether she had her hands full, though she set her girls to work betimes, as was the custom of the time, and amongst people of their class. Muriel had almost ceased to be one of them; she had come home at last only for a temporary rest. The homely offer to "darn the stockings to help her," restored the balance, and set Muriel in her old place. Always ready to help where help was needed. The mother would be sorry when Muriel had to go back again.

There was, however, plenty of life and laughter in the house, for the cares of the nation, or of their elders, seldom press heavily on young people; and, whether it was the attraction of Muriel's narrow escape, or of her soft brown eyes and melodious voice, the "army of cousins" were not slow in following the footsteps of Milly Hargreaves and Bob Bent, and when the sons and daughters of John D'Anyer's many married sisters and brothers were gathered together in that parlour in Broom-street to sing and chat, and try the mettle of the old harpischord, they made a nice little family party. "Not finer men or women to be found in England, sir," was John D'Anyer's boast, a sentiment which had many an echo.

It was change and refreshment for Muriel, and though there was a retarding enemy in her breast she was doing her best to dislodge, she grew stronger as the days and weeks went by.

The shaking journey home had not improved her foot, and she was long unable to use it, but she kept her fingers busy, took Sara's education in hand, and her rest on the sofa was anything but the rest of indolence. And as her fingers flew, her voice rose in song, the welling up of a cheerful spirit gladdened by freedom and home influences.

She had not been home a fortnight when Sara—who had taken Muriel fully into her loving young heart—whispered one evening in confidence to Joe Bent, at the close of a song by Marion—who had a voice of great power and compass—"I like Muriel's singing better than Marion's, it may not be so full nor so fine, but it is—it is—as sweet as a bird's, and I like it best."

"Say you so; then we'll have a song from the bird," he answered, with a good-humoured nod; and after a little pressing, the bird in the sofa-nest was warbling an old ditty as simply and unaffectedly as if she had been singing to Mrs. Hopley's children, instead of to an auditory of cousins, who were, or thought themselves men and women.

"Who's that singing in the parlour?" exclaimed John D'Anyer. He was smoking a long pipe in the back sitting room with James Hargreaves, and talking over trade matters, having a

tankard of ale on the table between them. His mother-in-law had just walked in after business to see how Muriel was getting on, and to bring a new specific for Ellen's rheumatism.

"Muriel," answered Mrs. D'Anyer quietly from the corner, where she sat out of the draught of the open window.

"Tchut, nonsense! Muriel never had a musical pipe like *that*. The notes are as clear as a bell, and as sweet as—" (he seemed to lack a comparison) "aye, as Marion's. It can't be Muriel!"

Nevertheless he rose from his seat and went, pipe in mouth, to the door of the other room to satisfy himself. He remained to listen.

"Well, art thah satisfied?" cried Mrs. Bancroft on his return.

"Egad! it is Muriel after all! I did not think the lass had so much music in her."

"No!" jerked out Mrs. Bancroft, sharply, "thah never didst see anything good in Muriel, but wait till she can sit up and touch the harpsichord; though I dare say the poor thing is out of practice now. There's more in Muriel than thah dreams of, and so I told thee years ago. I said I'd see her natural gifts were not lost for want of cultivation, and mark the result. Don't think those fine nephews o' thine in th' next room were drawn hither by Anna's pretty face, that thah thinks so much of; or by Marion's black eyes and raven hair, or even her fine voice, and she's a fine lass I admit. How often did they come bethink thee till Muriel came home? Once in a month, belike. Other folk have keener eyes and ears than thah hast, John; and mayhap thah'll find more beauty in the lass some of these days than is to be found in face or figure, and Muriel's none so ill-looking after all. And maybe thah'll discover that some day through other folk's eyes."

"Bravo! old dame, stick up for the lass! My Milly'll back thee!" cried James Hargreaves, knocking the ashes from his pipe, by way of emphasis.

John D'Anyer had already discovered that "Muriel was not so ill-looking after all," but he had failed to see the attractions others found in her, and was not disposed to set her before his queenly Marion, or his fair-haired, favourite Anna, or even the childlike loveliness of Sara. She was a comely maiden, he admitted, but that was all. And he argued that when the newness of her presence wore off, the visitors would drop off too—unless there were other attractions.

Muriel had wondered to see so many of their relations and others dropping in at unexpected times and seasons, meeting in groups that filled the parlour twice or thrice a week; that old

familiar parlour where the dark mahogany chairs and tables shone like glass with much rubbing, and the bright brass fender mocked the mirror with its polish, and where her own embroidery adorned the walls, in company with the newly painted portraits of father and mother. There had been no such gatherings in the old times, except at Christmas or Whitsuntide, and then by invitation. Perhaps it was because her cousins and sisters were now grown up; and she by no means disparaged the attractions of the latter. Of herself as a magnet she had not the feeblest perception. So keenly had she been made to feel her own lack of beauty, at home and at school, that if her looking glass repeated, "You are not so very ill-looking after all," she took it apologetically only. She could not compare her features with any of her sisters, or with Milly Hargreaves; and the seam below her under lip was an antidote to vanity. Of her symmetrical hands and arms, she had quite a delusion, perhaps born in the days when chilblains nipped them. She had neither come in contact with pictures nor statuary to correct her error, and was weak enough to be sensitively ashamed of them.

One day Lucinda Holmes, watching her slender fingers busy at her frame, had remarked casually, "What beautiful hands you have, Miss D'Anyer!" and Muriel had, with a pang of pain, dashed both her hands behind her out of sight as if to hide their ugliness, and the look with which she confronted astonished Lucinda, was strange on *her* face. It said plainly as words, "Do you mean to insult me?"

She had taken the remark for irony. Since then, she had overmastered the painful consciousness of utter plainness, but she had not arrived at the consciousness that her charm of expression supplied all that was wanting of classic outline, or peachy skin.

It was only natural, she thought, that Anna and Marion should be admired, and if she had not an interpreter in her own breast, her grandmother had furnished the clue to the many "*accidental*" meetings of Robert Bent and Milly Hargreaves in their pleasant parlour. It did not take her long to penetrate *their* secret, although they kept it well concealed under their cousinship—or fancied they did.

A warning glance had told Milly that she was suspected, and the very next day saw her by Muriel's side entreating secrecy.

"Bob is so incautious, Muriel! He says he cannot help it, he is so passionately fond of me; and he is urging me to let him put up the banns; and oh, Muriel, I don't know what to do, for I love him dearly—and—and—if father knew he would half kill

me. He has promised I shall marry old Stott, the carrier, and I——"

"What, Stott, the Yorkshire carrier? His waggons used to carry goods for father, when I was quite a little one."

"Yes, that's him! And I can't; and I won't! He's old enough to be my father, and he's as ugly as sin!" cried Milly, in a passion of desperate earnestness.

"Scarcely," said Muriel gravely, smoothing Milly's hair as she spoke, for the girl was still on her knees; "scarcely so ugly as the sin of deceiving your father. Speak plainly to him, or let Robert do it; or wait until you are older," and Muriel looked lovingly on the handsome cousin beside her, whose lofty but somewhat narrow brow was puckered with perplexity."

"Robert! Oh, that's just as bad. Aunt Bent has set her mind on his marrying Miss Barber, and it's all for money on both sides. I declare it's enough to drive one mad! I wish there was no money!"

"We should get on very badly without it, Milly. And suppose you and Robert were to get married, how would you live without it? Until his articles are out, and he is admitted as an attorney, he cannot practise for himself. And unless you married with the approval of one side or the other, I see no chance of anything more than a clerkship for him. Then neither you nor Robert have any experience of narrow means, or the discomfort they cause. I am very sorry for you, Milly, and I daresay you love each other sincerely; but take my advice, and do nothing clandestine, or you will be certain to repent one way or other."

"Ah," said Milly, "it's all very fine for you, who never were in love, to talk this way. You would think differently if a man you loved with your whole heart came begging and praying you to marry him, to make certain of each other. It's easy to hold down the latch when nobody pulls at the string."

A change came over Muriel's face, a change which extended to her voice as she replied soberly, "You are right, Milly, I have never been tried, and never expect to be; if I were, I hope I should have strength to do my duty; I *hope* so! but as you say it is easy to hold down the latch when nobody pulls at the string. I have, however, seen something of a secret marriage, and I still advise you either to act openly, or to wait."

And nothing more consolatory could Milly extract from her cousin beyond a promise not to betray her confidence; a promise she knew would be faithfully kept, and so she told Robert when she reported to him the advice she had received.

But Milly did not know when she burdened Muriel with a

secret what a weight it would be to her, or how the revelation had made her fear that Anna, who shared her bed, and muttered strangely in her sleep, had a secret too, a secret which was *not* confided to her keeping.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF HER HEALTH.

AUGUST was on the wane. Muriel had begun to use her foot about the house experimentally. Her mother, whose chronic complaint was troubling her, sat in her easy chair in the back sitting room, watching her fit on Marion the body lining of a new frock, when the drop handle was turned from without, and whilst Marion rushed to hide her disarray behind a curtain, Mrs. Bancroft walked in. She took in the situation at a glance, as Marion stopped short, curtain in hand.

"Oh, so thah's started dressmaking already. I should have thought thah might have waited till thah got back to Chester; and thah'll have to go in October. Mrs. Hopley won't hear of a release, though I have offered her a good round sum to obtain it; I think there's some spite about it, she's so stiff. But she's a determined body when she is thwarted. It's not often she turns her back on hard cash. So there's no help for it, and thah'd best not tax thi strength beforehand."

Muriel looked blank, and Marion crusty.

"I am not taxing my strength, grandmother. You would not have me to sit idle," said the former.

"Surely it won't hurt her to stand a few minutes; I've waited long enough for a new dress," was the comment of the other.

"And thah would wait longer if I had my will, Marion. Thah thinks of no one but thyself and thy own adornment," said Mrs. Bancroft, as she seated herself and loosed her black bonnet strings, regardless of the curl of Marion's long nose, as the home truth fell from the old lips.

"I've been thinking, Ellen," she began again, after a pause, still keeping a keen watch on her two tall granddaughters, "that if you and Muriel went to Buxton for two or three weeks, the baths would set both of ye up." She raised her hand, seeing that Mrs. D'Anyer was about to speak. "Now don't thah make

excuses, and say thah can't go. I'll bear the expense, and I say you *shall* go. I've seen John, and settled it with him."

"Well, mother, it's extremely kind of you, and if John's willing, I suppose I've no more to say than 'thank you,'" said Ellen D'Anyer, adding with some little hesitation, "I should think Anna and Marion could manage for a week or so without me!"

She was pretty sharply taken up, "Manage without thee, two great girls like thine! Dost ever reflect how old thah wert, when thah took on thyself to manage without *me*?"

Opposition was silenced. Muriel's gratitude shone in her eyes. She had heard Buxton vaunted as a very Bethesda for the cure of rheumatic patients, and she hoped her mother would leave all her aches and pains behind.

Marion did not take it pleasantly. "Grandmother Bancroft thinks of nobody but you; and what's to become of my dress?" she said to Muriel when her grandmother was gone.

"Oh, I'll finish that; and to keep her sister in a good humour she sat up working in their bedroom far into the night, when Marion herself was fast asleep, with Sara by her side.

Marion was not the only one dissatisfied. Two cousins, Ensign Fawcett of the 10th, and Joe Bent, Corporal in the Royal Manchester Volunteers, who were much more cousinly with Muriel than with each other, looked black at the announcement. Sam Bancroft grumbled; said his mother was always throwing her money away in that quarter. But that did not affect Sarah Bancroft. Her conscience was at work, she was doing what she could to set it at rest. She answered him, "Son, *thou* art ever with me, and all that I have is thine;" but Sam only rubbed his thighs and whistled. When had his mother quoted Scripture before?

Nevertheless he thought proper to bestir himself to escort his sister and niece at eight o'clock in the morning to the Swan coach office, in Market-street Lane, where inside places in the new Buxton coach had been booked the day before, and their modest trunk taken—a trunk at which your modern greengrocer's wife contemplating a holiday would turn up her nose in scorn. But durability, not variety, was then the characteristic of middle-class attire, and plain narrow skirts took little room.

"There's no depending on John D'Anyer to see them off at that hour, so don't you fail, Sam," his mother had said; but she was out in her reckoning.

It would have touched John D'Anyer in his weak point to have been supposed capable of failing in "the courtesy of a

gentleman." Sam, who had no such weakness, dropped in at their early breakfast and found his brother-in-law urbanely prepared to do "his duty as gentleman," filling his own pocket flask with home-made wine for the travellers, and carving beef for their sandwiches with quite an air of self-content at his own dexterity and importance. He welcomed Sam to partake of the good cheer upon the table with courtly hospitality, taking his brother-in-law's unwonted politeness quite as a gentlemanlike compliment; and Sam did not undeceive him.

Punctuality, too, was a part of John's creed. "It will never do to keep the coach waiting," said he, interrupting kisses and good-byes; "look at the clock!"

And precisely as the brazen fingers of the timekeeper in the tall polished walnut-wood case reached the quarter before eight, he had the lobby door open, and ushered his wife and daughter out with ceremonious politeness. The distance was not great, there was no haste. They were in good time, though other passengers and their friends were waiting, and the coachman stood whip in hand, watching the piling of luggage on the roof of the coach, whilst the clerk within the basement office made out the way-bill for his scrutiny. They were in time, for the frowsy ostlers had not yet brought the horses round from the stables at the back, and the red-coated guard had not finished his glass or his flirtation with the smiling barmaid who waited his leisure.

And there also were found the ensign of the crack regiment, and the corporal of volunteers, both waiting to see their aunt and cousin off, and looking as if each thought the other's presence an affront to be personally resented.

There was, however, the freshness of country air and his two mile walk upon Joe Bent, whose paternal abode lay outside the town on the north-east; he came armed, not with a sword, but a nosegay and a small basket of grapes from the Grange, and he had a triumphant smile as he presented his early morning offering.

Ensign Fawcett, who had strolled down leisurely from Portland Place, and considered his own superlative presence quite a sufficient compliment, stroked his smooth chin, and endeavoured not to look daggers.

Suddenly there was a bustle, the horses were there, there was a noisy backing to their places, a buckling of straps and harness. The guard looked to the priming of his blunderbuss, ladders were reared against the coach for the outside passengers, nimble ones mounted by the wheels, the "insides" were seated, coachman

and guard in their places, the whip cracked, the horn was blown, John D'Anyer raised his hat, the last adieus were waved to them as the four bounding steeds bore them away from Swan Yard, round the corner, up Market-street Lane, along Lever's Row and Piccadilly and the steep Bank Top to Shooter's Brow, where the town seemed to end and the country begin, for the last reeking lamp was left behind, and trees and hedges faintly shadowed forth seemed to glide past like ghosts in the midst of the summer morn. There was a glimmer of water as they crossed the gleaming Medlock, and passed the pond at Ardwick Green, and then the fresh air came in through the open windows, laden with flowery perfumes, and they felt as if home was already a hundred miles away, and they were driving on to regions remote and unknown.

At least, so felt Ellen D'Anyer, whose journeyings had rarely extended beyond church or market, or the homes of mother and mother-in-law, and to whom the leaving home for a day was momentous. "John was so uncertain, and travelling such a risk."

Muriel, who considered herself quite a traveller, inhaled the fresh air without a misgiving. "Don't fear, mother, all will go well at home," she leaned forward to say; "I feel as if there was a blessing in the breeze, and health and happiness in store for both of us. And don't you remember what you used to tell me, that we were safe if God's holy angels had us in their keeping?"

"Bless the girl! yes!" was the astonished answer, and no more was said. Indeed, Muriel felt disinclined to converse before their fellow-passengers, an old man in a scratch wig, over which a handkerchief was tied, and a couple of men whose talk was of "new fangled machines" of some kind or other, which were apparently in no great favour.

It was one o'clock when they alighted, faint and weary, at the Grove Inn, Buxton, and were shown into a room with a sanded floor to wait until there was an ostler at liberty to convey their luggage to their destination, and serve as a guide. And whether from over-much business, or from a lack of business, or from the natural sloth of the animal, quite half an hour elapsed before the man turned up with a straw in his mouth and a horsey perfume about him, in response to the red-faced landlord's repeated call of "Tim, Tim, where are you?" The coming of the coach was an evident intrusion on Tim's lazyhood.

They had no wearisome search for lodgings. Sarah Bancroft had "seen to that." A shopkeeper on the Hall Bank, who did

business with her, had comfortable rooms in readiness for them, and a dinner in preparation.

"Ah, mother's rather hard at times, but she's very thoughtful, bless her!" murmured Mrs. D'Anyer, as she removed her cloak and bonnet, glad to feel at rest. Their uphill and downdale journey had pretty well shaken appetite out of them. And rest was all that either wanted just then.

Had either of them gone to a window and looked down upon the level road between the bank and the Old Hall they might have descried someone then driving past in a luxurious open carriage pettishly making the same complaint: "wanting rest and finding none."

It was not four o'clock, yet the heat and glare of the day had subsided, when Mrs. D'Anyer and Muriel sauntered forth before tea to see the town and arrange for their hot baths; the former with the aid of her crutched stick and Muriel's arm.

They were speedily found at the end of the magnificent crescent the Duke of Devonshire had just built, and there something more was found which set Muriel's blood in a tingle.

A sedan chair was leaving the baths, from which a querulous feminine voice complained of the chairmen's roughness. "The clumsy brutes have shaken me to pieces!"

The voice was that of Mrs. Wynne, and in attendance Muriel recognised her stolid maid Owen and—yes, in all his fine proportions, Arthur Wynne himself.

Recognition was swift and mutual, but not swifter than the illumination of both countenances as Lieutenant Wynne, heedless of his mother's sharp "Who's that?" left the bearers to pursue their short course to the aristocratic lodging house in the Crescent, and advanced with quick step and outstretched hand to salute Miss D'Anyer, joy and surprise in every look and tone.

Their hands met, but not as when on Chester's ancient walls; since then the fillet had been torn from the eyes of both, and no affectation of composure could prevent the conscious thrill which ran through nerves and brain.

Yet there was nothing of undue familiarity in the manner of his approach, and though he put forth his hand it was with a sort of semi-apology, accompanied at the same time by a respectful, if a slight, inclination of the head towards the elder lady.

"Will you pardon me, Miss D'Anyer, if I venture to arrest your steps whilst I express my surprise at meeting you here? I trust that ill-health has not driven *you* hither to recruit your strength;" and Muriel saw that the words were no idle compliment.

She had laid her soft palm in his, though with scarcely the frank fearlessness of that first meeting on the walls of Chester, and there was not the same unconscious steadiness of voice.

"Only in part, sir ; I am better than I have been. It is my mother who seeks the benefit of the Buxton waters," and looking lovingly in the worn face of which her own was a far off reflex, she said, "Mother, you will be glad of this opportunity to thank Lieutenant Wynne for the life of your child."

The wave of doubt and surmise what strange acquaintance Muriel had formed in her long absence, swept away from Mrs. D'Anyer's brow ; her hand went forth to his in perfect trust and satisfaction.

"Indeed I shall," she said with feeling, "you made me for ever your debtor, sir, when you bravely threw yourself between my beloved Muriel and the hoofs which else would have trampled her to death. The gratitude of all our family has gone with you ever since," and the mother's eyes were moist with emotion as she spoke.

"Nay, nay," interposed he, "I only did what any man would have done under like circumstances. It was for me to be thankful I was at hand, and that the privilege of serving Miss D'Anyer did not fall to a stranger. But I must not keep you standing. Allow me, madam."

Substituting his strong arm for the crutched stick on which Mrs. D'Anyer leaned, he assisted her up the steps to a seat in the open vestibule where friends waited for their friends, or bathers for their baths ; and in so doing gained an opportunity for longer conversation than could have been held whilst standing in the open air.

Let us not ignore his politeness so far as to say this was intentional ; but impulse waits on thought and feeling, and both outrival electricity in speed. He had seen nothing of Muriel since he had left her at Mrs. Hopley's door, an object of the tenderest compassion, the warmest admiration, the deepest respect. She had dismissed him, and forbidden his return or inquiry, at the instigation of duty, not inclination ; and he had respected her motives with a degree of delicacy rare enough, and in so doing had bound the broad fillet of "honour" round impulse and emotion. It was that same honour which had restrained his pen when every other feeling in his breast bade him give his love and admiration words. Yet he had not gone forth intent on crushing the rising passion in his breast as incompatible with duty, but bent on moulding circumstances to his will, and making love and honour one.

How he might have acted had he contemplated Muriel's removal from Chester in his absence there is no knowing ; there is a weak spot in every hero's breastplate.

Certainly it was no slight shock when he went back in charge of a recruiting party to find that the imprisoned bird had flown, and that no one was able or willing to furnish other information. Mrs. Hopley was as impenetrable as a stone. She regarded him as the root of her annoyance. The youngster who had reminiscences of a bright shilling admitted that, "Some folk had been and made a row over her foot and carried her off in a po-chay." But that was all he got in exchange for a second silver portrait of King George.

How many golden pictures of that monarch would he not have given to know that the "po-chay" had borne her no farther than the Yacht Inn, and that she was even then within the haven of its antiquated walls, preparing for a longer flight. It is scarcely likely he would have looked down unmoved from the parapet of the Eastgate on the chaise tearing wildly under its arch, had he known who were its occupants, or that he had missed Muriel by a day—only a day !

And he would have been other than he was had he resigned himself to her disappearance, and dismissed her from his mind. So far his love had met with opposition only, but in the obstinacy of manhood it reared its crest the higher at each impediment. A woman broods and broods over an unavowed attachment until it permeates her whole existence, especially if her lot be not an active one. A man has many distractions, or he can make them, but no distractions of the outer life could banish from the heart of a man of Arthur Wynne's temperament the image of the girl on whom he had once set his affections. He had no leisure for the indulgence of morbid melancholy, but he found himself pondering the ways and means of seeking the lost, and bringing his love to a favourable issue, much more frequently than was compatible with his peace of mind.

And now, called from his military duties to attend his invalid mother for a brief period, his good fortune had brought him face to face with the lost ! He might disguise his delight beneath common conventional courtesy, but it was too real to permit another parting without some looking forward to another meeting. He "would not lose sight of her so hopelessly again ; that he was determined."

On the other hand, Muriel was no less pleased to meet her "true friend" once again, than to introduce her hero, her "Prince Arthur," to her beloved mother, and the ribbons in her

straw hat, the spots on her printed linen gown, or the sash which fluttered below her silken scarf, were not rosier than the face he looked down upon with such a light of satisfaction in his own.

Every movement of the loved is of interest to the lover. There was a gap to be filled up for him since he left Muriel in so pitiable a condition at Mrs. Hopley's door. No wonder he lingered in the hope of information, and though she seemed strangely tongue-tied, Mrs. D'Anyer was not. So as he stood there before them in his military undress, in form, feature, bearing, the very model of a man and a gentleman, the conversational shuttlecock was kept in motion, shyly at first by Muriel, to whom her grandmother's warning recurred afresh, till at length restraint had worn off, and he had learned much with which the reader is already acquainted, not excluding the causes which had led to her removal from Mrs. Hopley's and her visit to Buxton.

He ground his teeth in a spirit of anything but charity towards that queer priestess of fashion; but, as it dawned upon him that the ball dress casually named in reference to Muriel's long hours and night work, when her foot required rest, must be one and the same with that airy blue gauze which had draped with such fatal lightness round his own mother's form, he recalled the scorn and contempt with which Mrs. Wynne had spoken of the sweet girl before him as the "mantua maker's apprentice at work on her own robe."

It was by no means a pleasant reminder, whether he regarded the penalty his own mother had paid for her devotion to fashion, or her instrumentality in adding to the pain of Muriel, or the latter's legal subjection to the unfeeling old mantua maker. And I am not sure the last was the least discordant note in the trio. A man may be deeply in love, and sensitive regarding inequality of rank at the same time, and in spite of chivalry, love and pride will have a fight for the mastery.

"Cruelty! Barbarity!" he had interjected between the pauses of Mrs. D'Anyer's speech, but he listened with fresh interest as she proceeded to say:—

"It was never with my goodwill that a child of mine was removed from our own hearth to be placed with strangers at a distance. It was all my mother's doing, and I could never fully penetrate her motives. She must certainly have been misled in her estimate of Mrs. Hopley, for I know well she had Muriel's welfare at heart."

"Oh, yes, I am certain of that," interrupted Muriel, not sorry to have this explanation made.

"I only marvel Mr. D'Anyer gave his consent, considering his

own excessive pride of birth," continued the mother more in private rumination than for the listener's ear, though she added as a climax, "and to think that she should be compelled to go back to serve so hard a taskmistress for more than another year almost breaks my heart!"

"And mine," was the vibrating echo in the breast of Arthur Wynne, who looked in Muriel's face and wondered how she could so calmly lay her hand on her mother's arm, and say, "Never mind, mother dear, things may be better when I go back." But he came to the just conclusion that the girl was only hiding her own disquiet, in order to allay that of her parent.

After that he took his departure, but not before he had made known that his leave expired very shortly, having been granted solely to permit his attendance on Mrs. Wynne during her painful and tedious journey from Wales. He had, moreover, obtained permission to call on the ladies at their lodgings on Hall Bank. That gained, he strode forth into the open air, as if the ground was firmer under his feet than it had been an hour before.

"Quite a gentlewoman, is Mrs. D'Anyer," was his mental verdict as he crossed the arc of the Crescent.

"A very courteous and affable young gentleman," remarked Mrs. D'Anyer when Muriel returned to her side, after paying the customary fees for the local charity, and making arrangements for their daily baths, and as if revolving the question in her own mind. "And so that lady in the chair was Mrs. Wynne! Do you think she recognised you?"

"I think not, mother! But if she did, she would remember me only as Mrs. Hopley's apprentice, and as such pass me by."

The admission was followed by a sigh, less for Mrs. Wynne's peculiarities than for her own grandmother's mistaken policy.

"The son does not take after his mother, then," resumed Mrs. D'Anyer, as she bent her slow steps towards their own lodgings by the aid of her stick and Muriel's arm.

"Indeed he does not! Both he and Major Wynne are true gentlemen. Yet I am very sorry for Mrs. Wynne. Mrs. Parry told us she was quite a cripple. She must feel it very keenly, to say nothing of the pain; for she has been a great beauty and a leader of fashion. She can go to no more balls and races now."

"Well, my dear, a woman at her time of life should be thinking of something more serious than balls and entertainments. Mrs. Wynne has spent her life in an unhealthy round of fashionable frivolity, so Mrs. Parry also told your grandmother. The cheek may prove as salutary as it was sudden."

"It may," assented Muriel briefly, as they began to ascend the

Hall bank; and no more was said; Muriel's thoughts having gone astray after the noble young officer to the haughty Mrs. Wynne, in wondering question what the latter would have thought or said could she have been present to see and hear the condescension of her son. Then she dwelt on words, and tones, and looks, of his, and perplexed herself with questionings whether her heart was a true or false interpreter; and as she remembered her own blushes, she blushed again to think he must have observed them.

And then she took herself to task for feeling tongue-tied in his presence, as she had never felt before. "He must have thought me strange and stupid," she argued.

Whatever he did think it was not that. He crossed the Crescent to the spot where the sedan had entered the colonnade, more than ever convinced that in spite of disparity of rank Muriel was the one woman in the world for him, and he must so shape circumstances as to make her his wife. They did need shaping, he was conscious. He had little beyond his pay, and the pay of a lieutenant offered no temptation to matrimony. Nor was his father so rich as to curtail his own income willingly for a son who married without his consent. And though his mother was amply endowed, her fortune was settled strictly upon herself, and he knew that she was so bent on seeing him the husband of his rich cousin, that unless Pauline ran off with Sir Jenkyn—of which he had some hope—he could have no expectations in that quarter. True, the bulk of his mother's property descended to him on her demise, but he no more took that contingency into his calculations than his succession to the Wynne baronetcy. The shaping of circumstances to his will was therefore not a simple matter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

THOUGH even in the days of the Romans, Buxton was a health resort, and though it now flourishes amid foliage and verdure, one of the gems of the earth, it was a small, dreary town in a wide hollow, amongst bleak and barren moorlands, in the last century. Drives, hanging woods, picturesque gardens, were not. Hucksters brought provisions into the town; there was not even

a market to diversify the scene. The area within the noble Crescent—which Crescent a recent enthusiast has dubbed “a symphony in stone”—the semi-Gothic temple then sheltering the wondrous springs, hot and cold from the same rock; the “Stanecliff” above those wells, where patients tested their own strength; the polygonic stables, with their inner circus for equestrian exercise; the Old Hall and its garden; the spar and curiosity shops under the colonnade; the baths; the one reading and coffee room; the one circulating library; the one ancient little church—were all confined within a limited space, and visitors in quest of the picturesque glories of the Peak had to ramble farther afield, and mostly on foot.

It had certainly an assembly room in the principal hotel, and a theatre like a barn, where during the season dramatic performances might be enjoyed three times a week; but otherwise it had few compensations within itself for those who wanted neither to drink the waters nor to bathe in them.

Sir Madoc did both in order to keep incipient gout at bay, yet even he had to seek the solace of his snuff-box and the card-room; but Pauline would have been desperate had not Sir Jenkyn followed in their wake, and been at hand to ride, or drive, or promenade and flirt with, or to arrange parties for visiting the wonders of the Peak. He, however, was an amazingly companionable fellow, drew people together without difficulty, had a spice of adventure and enthusiasm, and by the time Muriel encountered Arthur, had thrown the latter considerably into the shade.

Not that the lieutenant raised any objection, he seemed rather to enjoy it than otherwise; gave his invalid mother no cause to complain of inattention, and professing no ardour for exploration, whenever horses and vehicles had to be abandoned for the inspection of “hole,” or “cavern,” or “Tor,” and there was climbing and scrambling to be done, where a masculine hand or foot might be called to the aid of a feminine, he was given to lag behind and leave a clear field to his rival. And as their infirmities detained Sir Madoc and his sister-in-law in the waiting carriages at a distance, the natural re-adjustment passed unobserved. It was a natural re-adjustment; the dash of assertive independence in Pauline, and her spirit of daring—so distasteful to Arthur, had a wonderful charm to Sir Jenkyn, the most reckless of riders, the boldest of mountaineers.

Arthur Wynne himself, tied as he was pretty much to a querulous invalid's side, did not find Buxton attractive; even sympathy with his mother's condition was so modified by a

knowledge of its cause, that he began to find his attendance irksome, and to long for a return to his duties and freedom.

"I shall be glad to escape from this confoundedly dull place. It is enough to give a man the horrors to encounter only suffering in his walks; to have nothing brighter to look out upon than a barren hill, and the gossiping invalids round St. Ann's Well," had been his hasty comment in the ear of Sir Madoc that sunny morning in August, which Muriel had found so sultry in the stage coach.

"I say, that's not complimentary to Pauline," had been flung after him, as with a "Can't help it," and a stifled yawn the young fellow had left his uncle to the solace of his snuff-box, in the hands of limping Norris, who numbered shaving and hair-dressing among his various duties, and was much more ready to serve the hearty if hasty old gentleman than to attend his exacting mistress.

What a transformation a few hours had effected. If the "dull place" had suddenly blossomed like a rose, Arthur Wynne could not have felt more exhilarated, or more buoyantly have ascended the stairs to that spacious drawing room in the Crescent where his mother, seated by a window, looked drearily out on the Staneclyff, in all its bareness and sterility, where nothing grew but a few sparse bushes and gorse, and where nothing had then been planted but post and rails to mark boundaries where feet might tread, or to assist them up the ascent, and where occupied seats suggested how wearisome that ascent might be.

Wearisome enough must the prospect have been to Mrs. Wynne, who could take no part in Buxton's few amusements. It was much as if a brilliant butterfly with its wings crushed and torn lay gasping on a wall, whilst the sunshine lit a host of fluttering wings that flitted by unheeding. She had languished and courted admiration at her last ball; she "would not consent to take her place with antiquated spinsters and dowagers at the card table." When not driving out, or at the bath, or taking the water of St. Ann's Wells, her only refuge and resource was the window. There, in a wheeled chair, luxuriously cushioned to ease her contracted limbs, she sat in rich attire, her hands, no longer slender and jewelled, lying cramped and idly in her lap, her weary eyes discontentedly watching the people passing to and fro, or climbing with slow steps the barren hill before her, or crowding round the Gothic temple which enshrined the waters of Hygeia, as they gushed from the limestone into marble basins, offering health to all who drank.

She was so seated, and alone, miserably bewailing her lot,

when her son entered with a free, firm step the apartment over the colonnade. It was draped and fitted with the sombre and heavy taste of the period, a narrow chimney glass and circular mirror with candelabra alone giving lightness to the soberly-painted walls.

Turning her head slightly she said pettishly :—

“ Where have you been all this while, Arthur ? It was cruel to leave me to the mercy of those horrid chairmen.”

“ Owen was with you, madam,” answered he, with deference.

“ Owen indeed ! As if Owen could be expected to take the place of my son ! And even Owen neglects me now my own kith and kin desert me.”

“ I am sorry, my dear mother, you should think me remiss. I concluded Pauline would be here with you.”

“ With me indeed ! ” she jerked out. “ She is off with that odious Sir Jenkyn to the play ; gone too, without a chaperone ! It’s little she cares for me now-a-days, and it’s all your fault. She would never have looked at Sir Jenkyn had you done your duty. But all are alike, no one consults *my* wishes. Even Sir Madoc has gone into the coffee room to see the *Times*. No one cares for my desolation,” and the poor contracted fingers made an effort to raise a perfumed handkerchief to her eyes.

Arthur drew his chair to her side, and attempted to soothe her. Some new expression on his countenance must have caught her eye.

“ Who were those people you spoke to near the baths ? ” asked she, irritably.

“ Friends of mine I met on my travels,” replied he with good humour.

“ I should like to know the strange friends who could divert you from your duty ! ” she whined rather than exclaimed.

“ Shall I introduce them ? ”

She turned her eyes full upon him as if she would have looked him through.

“ Introduce them to *me* ? Decidedly not. A soldier picks up acquaintances in his travels not always suited for the society of his mother.”

“ You are quite right, madam, he *does*,” he answered with some emphasis, and a meaning all his own, adding lightly, and with a shrug of his broad shoulders, “ I only thought you wished it.” But he rose and paced the room, asking himself who would be suited for the society of one so exacting and discontented.

“ Do stop that monotonous tramp ! ” she whined presently. “ And if you have no news to amuse me with, pray ring for candles and cards. We may manage to kill time with them.”

Unprepared for eternity, and yet anxious to *kill time*?

"Kill time? Nay mother, does not time kill us?"

A sudden reminder of all that time had killed in her and for her, smote the worldling. She shuddered, became hysterical, called for her maid and a vinaigrette, and was not to be comforted.

More than three-quarters of an hour were thus consumed, and then with many a sigh she composed her nerves in a game of piquet with her son, though it was an effort to hold the cards together in her hands, and the unwonted vivacity of her partner seemed to annoy rather than enliven.

That night as Owen removed the paint from the faded face, the too youthful robes from the rheumatic shoulders, she was asked,

"Did you ascertain who those people were?"

"They were strangers, ma'am. No one knew, but I'm sure I've seen the young lady's eyes before, somewhere."

"Eyes?" questioned her mistress, "eyes? What colour where they?"

"Brown, ma'am, very soft and large and mild."

"Ah!" And the eyes haunted the lady's sleepless pillow. They lit up the dreams of her son.

"Why, Muriel, dear, Buxton seems to agree with you, I have not seen you so bright and fresh since you came home!" cried Mrs. D'Anyer, when Muriel carried an early breakfast to her bedside the next morning. "Have you been up long? I did not miss you."

"Up and out an hour ago!" was the ready answer.

"I thought if I had my bath before breakfast, I should be completely at liberty to wait on you for yours. And who do you think I met on the way back? Who but Lieutenant Wynne. He offered to help me up the slope that faces the Crescent, and told me that the efficacy of the waters is tested in the ascent. People who hobble beneath on crutches when they come, mount to a higher level day by day as they improve. He was extremely kind when he discovered that it taxed my foot to ascend, and insisted on my using his arm all the way back to the very door. I was much obliged, for the water I drank at the well seemed to flush my face and turn me giddy. He said it was always so at first."

The flush still lingered, and her eyes were lit with joyous excitement. All her grandmother's cautions, all her own seemed to be forgotten in a newer dawn.

"In that case," said her mother gently, as she sipped her coffee, "you had better not go again to the baths or to the well

until I can accompany you; but whether she meant as a precaution against the officer or the mineral water did not appear.

She had her own bath in the forenoon, her own draught from St. Ann's restorative fountain, and discovering that they had a like effect on herself, was not sorry to accept the same strong arm on her way to the shopkeeper's on the Hall Bank, and even to the room above the shop. "It *might* be only the water that had so flushed *Muriel's* face, and the lieutenant was certainly most courteous to lend his arm to a middle-aged woman and adapt his steps to hers." And very polite it was of him to be so attentive when they again met him by accident that afternoon under the colonnade.

Mrs. D'Anyer was not a woman of the world, and she argued from very narrow premises in this case. She had not been wont to chaperone an attractive grown-up daughter.

But in fact the area of Buxton proper was so circumscribed it was almost impossible for the comparatively few visitors bathing, or drinking the waters, to avoid meeting or otherwise coming in contact, howsoever rank or pride might hedge itself round with exclusiveness; and where there was a desire to meet, opportunity was not wanting.

Surely of these none met more frequently than Lieutenant Wynne and Muriel, or she fancied so. On her way alone from her own early morning bath, or when in attendance on her mother to hers, or to the springs, or on the promenade, or mounting the steep Stanecliff, he seemed ubiquitous. And whether he was with others and only touched his cap, or turned and walked by her side, or lent his arm to sustain Mrs. D'Anyer's unequal steps to the door on the Hall Bank, or sat with them for an hour after candles were lit, his respectful bearing underwent no change, though as he watched the affectionate care of the girl for her parent, or listened to her when, as fond mothers will, she unsuspiciously dilated on the excellence of her child whenever Muriel was out of hearing, his esteem and admiration grew with every meeting, and love spoke eloquently in every look and tone.

As ever, love brought its own burden of doubt, and worry, and anxiety. He could not bow from the side of Mrs. Wynne's wheeled chair, or touch his cap when riding with Sir Madoc and Pauline, or Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson, or cross the promenade, or mount the hill with the D'Anyer's, and not arrest the gaze of interested eyes.

A week had not passed before his mother assailed him with reproaches of neglect, and more. "You are bringing disgrace on

your family, by consorting with a mere mantua maker's apprentice and her plebeian mother," she complained; "I shall never survive it. Flaunting your acquaintance in my very face. You could not do more if you meant to marry her!"

"And I *do* mean to marry her *if* she will have me, as soon as I can do so justifiably," he answered steadily. "Honour forbids my marrying on a lieutenant's pay with so small a supplement as is mine at present, and I cannot involve the woman I love in the misery of poor gentility."

"You *love!* you *love!* This to me!" she almost shrieked. "I, who would have given you half my fortune on your marriage with Pauline; but not one penny of mine shall pave the way for that common needlewoman to step into the place of Pauline, and call *me* mother. And if *honour* forbids, so do I forbid!"

"A common needlewoman!" he echoed. "Miss D'Anyer is one of those rare women whose price is above rubies! You are my mother, madam, and as such claim from me a son's respect; but there is a limit to forbearance, and I am not of a race to brook your scorn of so pure and sweet a girl. There is a spirit of rebellion in the blood, as well you know!" and he strode from her presence only to encounter Sir Madoc in the colonnade before that blood had altogether cooled.

"I say, I say, nephew Arthur, who's that brown-eyed damsel you are dangling after at all hours? I don't suppose the old dame's the attraction."

"She is Miss D'Anyer, sir, a young lady for whom I have the very highest esteem," was said loftily.

"I say, that's rather strong, look you. But D'Anyer, D'Anyer!" and Sir Madoc, who had the pedigrees of two or three counties at his fingers' ends, tapped his snuffbox lid, and rolled the word on his tongue, as if to try its family flavour. "Any connection of the Cheshire D'Anyers of Frodsham and Lyme—the descendants of Thomas D'Anyer, the hero of Cressy, I mean?"

The suggestion was enough for Arthur Wynne. It recalled a conversation with Mrs. Kingsley on Red Riding Hood's ancestral and family associations with the county. "I believe so," he said; "I know her only as the daughter of a Manchester manufacturer, but there is true nobility in her every look and word. She is a sweet, unselfish creature, a gem of the purest water, one in herself fit to adorn any rank, whatever her ancestry."

"I say, I say, Arthur, that won't do. What will Pauline say to your high-flown admiration of the manufacturer's daughter, look you?"

"She will echo what I said of her penchant for Sir Jenkyn; she was free to please herself," was the deliberate reply, over a pinch of snuff from Sir Madoc's box.

"Please herself!—*Sir Jenkyn*! I say, I say, what do you mean? Are not you to wed Pauline? And what has *Sir Jenkyn* or that D'Anyer girl to do with it, look you?" and *Sir Madoc*'s cane went down on the pavement, with an irritable stroke.

"Have you been blind, uncle; or am I the first to tell you that Pauline would run off with *Sir Jenkyn* to-morrow, rather than be forced to marry me the day after?"

"Nonsense, boy. *Sir Jenkyn*'s no more to Pauline than our old friend's son. It was settled in your cradles that you and Pauline should keep title and estates together for generations of Wynnes to come."

"Settled for us, uncle, you mean, not by us."

"I say, what do *you* mean, you young rascal? Are you going to cry off, and slander my daughter at the same time. I understood you and Pauline were dying for each other a year ago!"

"My dear sir, I am afraid you have *misunderstood*. Pauline and I have been most affectionate cousins, and probably might have run our heads blindfold into the noose prepared for us—a year ago, as you say. But we have both cut our wisdom teeth since then, and are not puppets. Pauline changed her mind when *Sir Jenkyn* came on the scene, and I—well, uncle, *Sir Jenkyn* is a good-natured young fellow, rides well, shoots well, rows well, boxes well, makes love like a devotee, has a clear estate, a long pedigree, and—what more would you have? Pauline would prefer to take the leap with him rather than with her lukewarm cousin, depend upon it."

Sir Madoc was dumbfounded. His snuffbox suffered for his loss of speech. Then he spluttered out:—

"But, Arthur, I say, I say, I thought—I was told—you—you—*Celia*—your mother——"

"Leave my mother entirely out of the question, sir," interrupted Arthur in a changed tone, in which was some bitterness. "My mother has long known *my* sentiments in the matter."

"I wish I had."

"Well, uncle, I was never asked. You took too much for granted. But neither you, sir, nor Pauline can accuse me of double dealing or breach of faith. I neither made professions of attachment nor sought them. My attentions have been those of a cousin, not a lover. *Sir Jenkyn* came, and Pauline found the difference. She is not to blame—nor am I. Love comes at no man's bidding. I have had a most unpleasant interview with my

mother respecting—but here come Pauline and her cavalier, on their steeds. Watch them—am I not right ? ”

“ Egad, boy, I think you are. But I say, I say, Arthur boy, you mean to marry Pauline, don’t you ? ” and the tone in which the question was put seemed to tremble between the dolorous and the indignant.

An emphatic “ No, sir ! ” and Arthur was gone.

A genial, kind-hearted, good-tempered fellow was Sir Madoc, when not thwarted, and not suffering from gout, the special malady which, in an incipient stage, had induced him at the last moment to bear Major Wynne’s wife company thither—but he was somewhat obtuse, or heedless, and given to let the world wag on its way so long as his own little plans and arrangements were not disturbed. Sir Jenkyn’s devotion to his daughter had not hitherto disturbed him greatly, since it did not disturb Arthur. It was Arthur’s business, not his.

Arthur Wynne had opened his eyes and disturbed his equanimity with a vengeance. Bubbling over, he sought Mrs. Wynne, and had the matter out with her first. Then, there was a stormy interview with Pauline, and then with Sir Jenkyn ; and finding that only he and Celia held together on the marriage question, a letter went post-haste to the major to request his intervention. But a letter from his son already lay before the major, and moderated *his* views materially.

He had married beauty, birth, fortune. And to what end ? The beauty which had enslaved him demanded more than one man’s homage, courted the admiration of all eyes. His wife’s money, chivalrously settled on herself and her issue, had scarcely sufficed for her thousand whims and caprices. A flutterer among flutterers, she had left her only son to the care of nurses and tutors—perhaps well for him—whilst she gave her waking hours to fashion and folly—a whirl of pleasure which undermined her own health and finally involved him in a duel. Yet he had idolised her until her own selfishness and vanity had broken the charm. He was not sorry to be rid of her vagaries when, after a serious difference, she elected to make the Plas her head-quarters. To the early matrimonial compact for the young people, he had given a negative assent ; and so long as he was led to believe that his son’s heart was set on Pauline, he remained quiescent, although he would have preferred a daughter-in-law who had had a good mother’s training, and a less sophisticated chaperon. Now that he learned the truth for the first time, he was not minded that Celia should spoil the life of their son as she had spoiled his ; and in the epistle which had come from honest, simple-hearted,

transparent Sir Madoc, he traced the diplomatic finger of his wife. That influenced his answers to both. But letters did not fly on the wings of steam.

When on the Saturday afternoon Arthur Wynne the younger had gone through those explanations terminated with a decisive "No," he had marched straight away from Sir Madoc to his own room, and on the spur of the moment penned his confidential epistle to the major, in which he had poured forth not only his objections to a marriage with his cousin Pauline, but his love for Muriel D'Anyer, coupled as it was with doubts whether honour did not forbid his marriage, and consequently his proposing to her, on the scant pay of a lieutenant, knowing as he did that his good father could only add to his allowance by personal sacrifice.

The letter was in the little Post-Office in time for the south mail at seven that evening, and had thus been in Major Wynne's hands, and was read and well digested a couple of days before Sir Madoc's important missive offered its vermilion seal and coat of arms to be broken by authorised fingers.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DOOR FOR ESCAPE.

THE major was pretty correct in his judgment. If the penmanship of the epistle was Sir Madoc's, the baronet's impulsive diction had been checked and curbed by hints and suggestions from Mrs. Wynne. It had, in fact, been a joint concoction, to which had been devoted the morning hours when Arthur and Pauline would be "safely out of the way at church," as Mrs. Wynne expressed it.

She might have felt it otherwise than "safely" had she reflected that Mrs. D'Anyer and her daughter were likely to be among the worshippers in the little ancient barn-like church on the hill side, or that Sir Jenkyn might find his way thither, and supplant her son even at the church door.

At all events, she was not too well pleased when Miss Wynne, wearing a robe of canary taffeta, trimmed with lilac satin rouleaux, a lilac scarf across her shoulders, and a straw hat in which nodded three lilac feathers, and to whom the said Sir Jenkyn had made his bow at the door under shadow of the colonnade,

walked unattended into her presence, and, throwing down her large parasol, complained of the "insufferable heat."

"Where is Arthur?" she asked, to be answered with scornful indifference, "Oh, the owner of a prayer book with massive silver clasps required a page to carry it, and I presume he offered his services, since I saw it in his hand."

"Absurd!" ejaculated Mrs. Wynne.

"Well, it *was* rather; for had not the book been fit for a countess, I might have taken the owner for that dressmaking young woman he has been so gallant to of late."

It was clear that Miss Wynne's self-love had been wounded by Arthur's defection, whatever her own predilections for Sir Jenkyn might be.

Mrs. Wynne's brow darkened. "Is it possible that my son could so far forget himself in the face of a whole congregation?"

"Oh, quite possible," with a shrug.

"Leave *you* to walk home unattended?" and the enormity thereof was expressed in look and tone.

"Well, no—not exactly. There was Sir Jenkyn—and—a—David, you know." David was a footboy.

Miss Pauline had omitted to say that Mrs. D'Anyer was with her daughter at the time, or that Sir Jenkyn had previously superseded Arthur in his attendance on herself; not that it would have mattered much to Mrs. Wynne, who felt as if her son's atrocious conduct must be the common gossip of Buxton society. She could only cite as an excuse for him "the example of royal dukes in seeking companions among their inferiors, my dear," and "trust Pauline to hold him excused, as it meant nothing."

It certainly meant nothing material then to Miss Wynne, whatever it might have done previously to the advent of Sir Jenkyn in Buxton. But prior to that the dark-eyed belle had learned to dispense with much of her cousin's attention; and latterly had avoided it.

To *him* it meant everything in the world. It meant the rest which twilight affords after the glare of the sun. It meant the hope of a life companion worthy of all his trust; one whose feet were on the ascent to the heavenly city, not whirling downward in the path of folly, towards the gates of destruction. And if he carried Muriel's Bible, it was not to note or value its silver clasps, but with an unshaped consciousness that she was building up her life on its foundation. She was "different from all the women with whom he had come in contact," as he told his father; and he "should never rest until he had her promise to be his wife."

So that his walk from the church gates with Muriel and her mother to the lodgings over the closed shop, in the face of his Cousin Pauline and of the fashionable churchgoers and aristocratic loungers, did mean something, however Mrs. Wynne might seek to ignore it.

"Buxton really does seem to agree with you, my dear," said Mrs. D'Anyer to Muriel the next day, as she came in from a morning stroll with a flush on her cheek and a sparkle in her eye, and laid a book from the circulating library on the small round table. "I wish *I* did not feel so prostrate and drowsy after my baths, and could take the air with you, instead of lying here on a sofa, looking through a window all the forenoon."

"Oh, those are only the ordinary symptoms when the baths are efficacious, so Lieutenant Wynne informed me just now. He said his mother felt just the same for the first week or ten days; that was why she was carried to and fro in a sedan; but now, as you know, she goes in her regular wheelchair. He hopes you may be able to throw away your stick in a few days."

"I hope so, too. And so you met Lieutenant Wynne again?"

"Well, not exactly. I was trying how far I could mount up Stanecliff, when he came behind me and offered his arm for the ascent, though I told him that was scarcely allowing a fair trial of my strength. He had a gun on his shoulder, and was going, with a party of friends I saw in front of the old Hall, grouse shooting on the moors."

"You did not allow his politeness to keep him from his friends, I trust?"

"Oh, no, I—I think not." But Muriel felt her colour deepen as she bent down, pressed a kiss on her mother's cheek, and left the room hastily to remove her hat and scarf. If to escape further comment on her appearance, who shall say?

She certainly had grown brighter, brisker, and stronger; but whether the society of the young officer had not as much to do with it as the Buxton air and waters, is a moot point. Mrs. Wynne might slight and scorn her, but she bore it calmly so long as *he* did not despise her, and she knew that Major Wynne did not; and if she forgot all about her grandmother's caution in the delicious sensation of the hour, who could blame her? Her life had had few pleasures, least of all the pleasure of feeling valued by someone else; courtesy and attention had not been for her.

True, when she had last lain on the sofa at home, two of her masculine cousins had been more than commonly friendly, but their familiar attention was something very different from the respectful homage of Arthur Wynne, and that had its full weight.

No wonder she put her memories of the dreary workroom behind her, lest even its shadow should cross the sunshine on her path and mar her present felicity. She would not even look forward, lest duty should extinguish joy. At least she did not. If she had only looked, the light upon her face would have faded. Indeed, before that very day wore out, she had a reminder that pleasure could not last.

They had just risen from a plain dinner of trout fresh from the Wye, with a custard for a supplement, when in walked Joe Bent in his uniform, of which the volunteer corporal seemed as proud as if he had been a captain in the Guards. Indeed, I am not sure that he did not consider the volunteers superior to the regulars, in that they were unpaid, and so far free.

Be that as it may, preceded by a lumbering step up the dark and narrow staircase, he put in an appearance with a hamper in his hands, and the exclamation, "Well, aunt, you did not expect to see me! But here I am, and here is a basket of things from the Grange—poultry, fruit, and I don't know what. Mother said you would find them useful, as there was no market, and the higglers were such extortioners. And there are some of our early grapes at the top; I suppose you could not get those here at any price," he added, having by this time got rid of his burthen, and begun shaking Muriel's hands as if he had taken possession of her.

And nothing would serve, as he had already dined at the Inn, but he should take possession of his cousin and aunt for an afternoon exploration of the village. (Buxton had not then attained the dignity of a market town.) The spar shop under the Arcade was included in the tour, and it so came about that there was a handsome Blue-John vase upon the table, a gift to his aunt, and a necklace of gleaming satin spar beads round Muriel's throat, shifting their lights and shadows as she moved, when, as it happened, Lieutenant Wynne—who had somehow gained a familiar footing there—presented himself in the evening with a brace of grouse for the ladies, undeterred by the rain which was then falling fast.

Observing a stranger, he would have presented his birds and retired had not Mrs. D'Anyer detained him, and introduced her nephew, an introduction which seemed to give more pleasure to her than to the young man, whose open face clouded.

Arthur Wynne's name was not unknown to the corporal, and Joe eyed him dubiously.

On the other hand, Lieutenant Wynne, who noted both the purple vase and the new necklace, saw a possible rival in the very-

much-at-home cousin. But he was too well bred to display the contempt affected by many of his brother officers for the new volunteer service; and being desirous to ascertain on what footing the tall well-formed young relative stood with Muriel and with society, he composedly took a seat between the two windows, at which sat respectively Mrs. D'Anyer and her daughter, and entering into conversation made himself agreeable—even to Corporal Joseph Bent.

His chair was slightly in advance of Muriel, then netting in the window seat, for the benefit of the waning light, but it required no effort to watch her every movement in the strip of looking glass which adorned the opposite wall, with a triplet of peacock feathers atop, and in which was reflected not only Muriel, but Joe Bent on the sofa, leaning well over the low arm in closer proximity than he thought their cousinship warranted.

"Well, aunt, where's it to be? Poole's Hole, or Axe Edge, or Monsal Dale, or Castleton, or Chatsworth, or where?" cried Joe, resuming after a time an interrupted discussion. "If you can't sit a horse yet, I'll hire a roomy gig that'll hold us all three; and though I'm not counted such a whip as Bob, I'll drive you anywhere there is room for a pair of wheels. You see, Lieutenant," he went on, addressing the latter, "I knew aunt and cousin would go nowhere by themselves, so I set off by the coach this morning to take them about a bit."

"I wonder if 'them' means both, or only Muriel?" thought the said lieutenant, but he only replied:

"I am sorry to find myself forestalled. I came hither this evening to place a chaise and myself at the service of the ladies for the morrow. But if——"

"Hang his impudence!" thought Joe, as he interrupted him with, "I don't think they'd see much mewed up in a chaise, thank you all the same, lieutenant; and Muriel wants all the fresh air she can get before she goes back to be cooped up again under Mrs. Hopley's finger and thumb."

"Goes back!" echoed Arthur Wynne in dismay. "Surely Miss D'Anyer is not going back to—to that unfeeling woman!"

"I have to fulfil the term of my apprenticeship," said Muriel quietly, unaware how the last word jarred on the lieutenant's nerves.

"Yes, worse luck!" put in blunt Joe Bent.

"My good Mrs. D'Anyer!" the other broke forth in a state of mental perturbation, "you really should interfere to prevent such a sacrifice. I had no suspicion Miss D'Anyer was about to return. Is it not possible to rescue her from that—that—"

hardened brute of a dressmaker?" (Muriel shook her head.) "Surely there must be some means to save your amiable daughter from such cruel bondage." He had almost said drudgery.

"No, sir; we have no alternative, I am sorry to say. Her grandmother, who now regrets placing her there, has made several overtures to Mrs. Hopley, but for some unknown reason she rejects money, and will not be paid off," answered Mrs. D'Anyer gravely. "There is, however, one thing certain: she will not be allowed to starve my dear daughter again. Mrs. Kingsley and a friend in Wrexham will watch over her, and if needful, send in supplies by their market carts."

"Really, madam, the very precaution proves how monstrous must be the case. What does Mr. D'Anyer think of it?"

The reply came from Joe Bent. "Oh, I forgot to tell you, aunt, there has been a regular row over it between uncle and Mrs. Bancroft since you left; and he went to Bob's office to get at the law of the case, with all the blood of all the D'Anyers since Cressy flaming in his face."

"Yes, so I have heard," was her quiet rejoinder, as if to close the conversation.

All this was news to Muriel, who listened without speaking. A letter had come to her mother, but its contents were only partially known to her.

Arthur Wynne bent forward eagerly. "And the lawyer pointed out how you might circumvent the petticoated Shylock?" was rather a suggestion to Mrs. D'Anyer than an inquiry. In his recruiting experience he had learned somewhat of apprentice law.

"Certainly," was the prompt reply of Joe.

But Mrs. D'Anyer hesitated, her voice dropped as though to reach no ears but the questioner's, and she evidently spoke with reluctance, "Yes, sir, but the door of escape was not open to Muriel."

Joe must have had sharp ears, for he called out from the sofa, "Don't say that, aunt!" in a tone which sent a spasm of something like jealousy through Arthur Wynne's frame.

Muriel, silently intent on the conversation, made a long stitch in her netting, while she glanced at her mother over Arthur Wynne's bent shoulders, and wondered what door of escape that was of which she had never heard, and her mother seemed so loth to speak.

And Arthur Wynne, for the moment oblivious of those around him, wondered if *he* might be allowed to open it. For her sake, for his own, he could not permit her sacrifice, as he considered it. What was that the beloved girl was saying so composedly?

"I think, mother, that as my grandmother promised I should go back, I am bound to go, whether we like it or not."

"But, Miss D'Anyer," remonstrated the young fusilier, "remember what you have suffered ; imagine what may lie before you."

"Yes, I know ;" and Muriel shook her head, with a sigh which went to his heart ; "but I was not treated worse than others, and much of what I endured towards the last was due to my accident, for which Mrs. Hopley was in no way accountable ; and I must not cause my grandmother to break her word, even if the law allows it."

Joe chuckled comfortably to himself, as much as to say, "We shall see !" and "We will see !" was the inner thought of Arthur Wynne, but he only "hoped something might occur to set her free," which hope had a double echo.

The question was then dropped as candles were brought in, and the white dimity curtains drawn. That of the excursion was then renewed, when it was finally settled, little to Corporal Bent's satisfaction, that Lieutenant Wynne should join the party, on the morrow, on horseback, and take charge of Muriel, for whom he engaged to provide one of the small, steady-going native horses accustomed to the Derbyshire roads ; he having succeeded in convincing the volunteer that no gig capable of holding three was to be found in Buxton, seeing that the native vehicles were constructed for narrow roads and passes, and that if he wished to give his aunt an airing he must be content with her for his companion.

Then ensued another discussion on the route to be taken, the lieutenant, who had gained some experience during his stay, intimating that only pack-horse roads and bridges were to be found in certain directions, and Poole's Hole, Chee Tor, and Sherbrook Dell, could not possibly be reached in any vehicle. Fairfield, he said, had an old church worth seeing, and a fine view of Buxton, extending even to Axe Edge, might be obtained from the Barms—or racecourse—close by, provided no mist hid the mountain. They might catch a glimpse of Ashwood Dale, he intimated, in crossing the Wye Bridge ; and unless the ladies or Corporal Bent had any other proposal to make, he would respectfully suggest Fairfield as their destination, since the distance would not be such as to fatigue Mrs. D'Anyer.

Joe's knowledge of Buxton and its surroundings was all second-hand ; so, much against his will, he was constrained to defer to the lieutenant. Muriel and Mrs. D'Anyer were equally without an opinion or a wish save for propitious weather.

It was with very different emotions the two young men went to make their separate arrangements for the morrow.

"Confound his cool impudence!" was Joseph Bent's private ejaculation. "Why should he thrust himself into our party with his views and suggestions, and appropriate Muriel all to himself? It's lucky I came; and just as lucky he can't stay. He seemed mightily at home there. But, pshaw! soldiers in the line are here to-day, and gone to-morrow; I needn't be afraid of him."

"It was well I carried those birds myself," ruminated Arthur Wynne on his way to the stables, "and I was within an ace of sending Norris. It's a most fortunate circumstance; I might not otherwise have known how the darling girl is circumstanced. And it has thrown a marvellous opportunity in my way. It will never do to let that cotton spinner's free-and-easy son forestall me. How jaunty and how confident he was! That necklace and the vase were certainly his gifts. How I envied his privilege of presentation. I should have been afraid to presume. And perhaps the fellow presumed on his cousinship to clasp his beads around her neck!"

There was a long-drawn breath between set teeth—the sacrilege was not to be thought of without a pang—"I must do it, I must. Now there is a prospect of promotion, I can rescue the sweet girl without danger of plunging her into the misery of genteel poverty. I may lose her if I wait my father's answer; or I may be recalled ere that arrives," ran the current of the lieutenant's meditations, "and yet——" His arrival at the great stables cut his reverie short for the time being.

The "prospect of promotion" had come to him in a letter from Chatham which Mr. Moore, the postmaster, had put into his hands that afternoon—a long letter from his father, the contents of which, being mainly regimental, he had imparted to Sir Madoc and Mrs. Wynne, to be widely disseminated in the Assembly Rooms that night over their cards; the possession of so much news having overcome the dread of the latter to sink to her place amongst the elderly dowagers and spinsters at the card and gossip tables.

There was more in the letter than was laid bare to them, for the major wrote very freely to his son, and what he wrote had especial import to Arthur at that crisis.

It appeared that the 23rd Welsh Fusiliers, of which only the customary contingent remained in England, and which had won so much distinction at Port-au-Prince the previous year, had come back from St. Domingo to the dépôt at Chatham, the mere skeleton of a regiment. The fiery climate had made more havoc

than steel or gunpowder. Then followed personal comments on private or brother officers, who had been left behind for ever in that island of dread, where Yellow Jack was king, some whose friendship he had valued and regretted. Next came an exhortation from the major to his son not to loiter in Buxton now that Mrs. Wynne was settled in apartments and gaining strength, but to hold himself in readiness to be up and doing as soon as the Adjutant General's orders reached him. Recruiting would have to be no child's play merely to keep up the efficient strength of the regiment, but earnest, thorough, to re-create and form anew; and he might have to beat up North Wales once more. He was also reminded that with so many gaps to be filled up, the promotion of an active subaltern was next to certain.

It was this missive that, in spite of regret for friends whose hands might clasp his nevermore, had sent him, with pulses beating and cheeks in a glow, to Hall Bank through the rain, carrying the birds he had shot.

A straw will turn a wavering balance. The major had thrown one straw into the scale, Joe Bent had cast in another. Arthur paced the Crescent colonnade that night long after the rain had ceased, and the blinking lights of Buxton had gone out one by one, to think out by himself the momentous question wherein his own future lay, and with his own that of a dearer one. Whether he should risk all by an immediate declaration, or bide the issue of his father's decision. "Not for myself, not for myself, but for her!" he debated. "A false step might be ruinous to both. I cannot have my father's answer until Thursday—and before Thursday what might not—well, I have no time to lose, the morrow might recall me. I must speak, for her sake—ay, and for my own, for my heart is bursting. I may lose her if I hesitate, and she must not be sacrificed. My father would never have named promotion, had it not been certain. Yet, should he disapprove my choice, would it be certain? Pshaw! I wrong my father's honour by such a doubt; he is neither prejudiced nor unjust; and did not he marry to please himself?" That last argument set its seal on doubt. "I must, I must, if I would not resign her to the rough wooing of that volunteer cousin, who had no more decency than to make a covert offer before my very face. No, no, Mr. Corporal, Muriel is not for you. You must pardon me if I use your own weapons to fight against you."

The lieutenant stopped at the door to go in, first glancing up at the sky, where a silvery moon was sailing among fleecy clouds, and gave promise of a bright to-morrow. A broad patch of moonlight, slanting between two pillars of the arcade, rested on

his form, lit up the doorway as he entered; he accepted the augury with as radiant a smile.

Tuesday morning broke full of promise for the day. The showers of the night had only served to lay the dust and refresh the wayside flowers and foliage. The little Wye, not then so far covered up from the light of day, shone and sparkled, and danced along as merrily as the current in a lover's veins—here in sunshine, there in shadow—here glassed like a mirror, there fretting in foam over rocks and boulders, as a lover might fret and chafe at impediments—or so thought Arthur Wynne (to whom as yet no peremptory recall had come).

He and Muriel having the start led the way along the winding road, keeping well ahead of the gig, a cramped, clumsy, and heavy affair, not likely to spin along too rapidly. But he found Muriel such a novice in horsemanship, he had so many hints to give, such a careful watch to keep on her every movement, and he so dreaded startling her with an abrupt declaration of his feelings, that in his impatience he felt the time slipping by, and his opportunity with it.

Yet not wholly, for those very instructions afforded opportunities for words, and looks, and tones, which needed no interpreter, and he could not re-adjust the reins without the irresistible temptation to press and hold her hands if but for a moment. And Muriel must have been less than a woman if she had not seen and felt what was impending. That he was not repulsed spoke volumes.

Indeed—Muriel was more self-possessed than he—it may be she was on her guard, it may be she had her horse to guide, but though she never looked up at him, she directed his attention, now to the clearness of the water, then to the beauty of rocks or foliage, and as they were crossing the bridge on the Fairfield road, where to the right the beauties of Ashwood Dale invited foot and eye, with its tall limestone cliffs set like ramparts to guard the little river winding at their base, she reminded him that he was neglecting the very scenery they had come to admire.

“Nay, Miss D’Anyer, others might come to view scenery; I came for another purpose; and all I care to see, all the charm of the landscape, all the world holds of good or beautiful for me, is by my side—came with me.”

The gig was far in the rear, and out of sight. There was no one on the road. He laid his hand on hers, as if to steady it, and went on, “You were but a child, and I a boy, my dear Miss D’Anyer, when these gentle fingers closed the wound on my

brow, and I learned how kind, pitiful, and patient was the little maid I called Red Riding Hood. Years went by; the wound that healed on my brow had opened in my heart; and, Muriel—may I not call you Muriel, *my* Muriel?—I found that only the same hand could heal it.”

Muriel had miscalculated her strength, or she was not prepared for this; she felt dizzy; a mist seemed to come before her eyes; her colour went. He saw the change, and ere she knew how it occurred he was off his horse, and had her in his supporting arms under shelter of the tall cliff, imploring her forgiveness for his precipitancy, the well-trained animals standing still, and looking on as if in sympathy.

“You will forgive me, Muriel, will you not?” She made no effort to release herself, and he took silence for assent. “I have so much to ask, so much to say, and if I seem precipitate it is because I may be recalled any hour.” (Muriel started. Was his recall so near?) “I could only use the brief moments granted me to tell you how sincerely, how devotedly, I love you, and to ask if you would be my own dear wife;” and a second time he pressed her fingers to his lips.

Hoof beats and wheels drew near; she had barely time to withdraw from his encircling arms, when the gig came in sight upon the narrow bridge, and there was a shout from Joe:—

“Halloo, what’s the matter?”

“I went dizzy, that was all,” said Muriel; “I am better now,” her colour coming and going strangely as she spoke.

“Humph! you shouldn’t ride so fast,” from Joe.

“I hope your faintings are not going to return,” cried the mother anxiously. “You see, she is not much accustomed to riding.” This by way of excuse. “Perhaps we had better go back.”

Muriel would not hear of this; she declared she was better, and ready to remount. But to this Arthur Wynne put in his word, suggesting that her cousin might drive on slowly, while she rested a few minutes on a large stone hard by; the gig would soon be overtaken; to which, after some demur, she and Joe both assented. It was this desire of hers to go forward that disarmed Joe’s suspicions. Mrs. D’Anyer had not conceived any.

A shrinking that was not timidity impelled Muriel to remount, a glance of hopeless sadness in her lover’s eyes compelled her to remain.

The horses were securely tethered before the gig was gone, and the first low words she heard were, “I was afraid you were

leaving me to despair. What answer am I to expect from your stay?" He saw she was pale, and still, and grave, and his buoyant hopes fell.

There was silence, unbroken save by the song of birds. He stood before her, watching her sobering face. "Miss D'Anyer," he asked, with quiet intensesness, "have I been too presumptuous? Can you not love me?"

Back came the crimson tide to her cheek and brow, and down went the tell-tale face into the trembling hands, as if to hide the lips from which burst the words, "Love you! ah, too well!"

There was space on the rock for two, or he made it. He imprisoned her hands, her form. She loved him, and that alone was ecstasy. The words were low and broken in which he told his joy.

But she shrank from his clasp. "Don't," said she, "I cannot bear it; I must not listen to you. Let us go."

"Love me, and not listen to me?" he questioned in amazement. "What can this mean?"

"It means," she said, summoning all her strength, "that I cannot bring disunion into a family, and therefore cannot marry you. Mrs. Wynne would scorn the mantua-maker's apprentice, and you forget, sir, I am still that, and am due at Mrs. Hopley's in October."

"Forget it! That I do not! My beloved Muriel, if you will only become mine, we may set Mrs. Hopley at defiance. She cannot claim a married woman as an apprentice."

A light broke on Muriel. *This* was the door of escape the law opened to her. This was the secret of his declaration. Had Arthur Wynne lost sight of his integrity in his desire to spare her another year's probation? Was he braving the displeasure of his family for *that*? Her grandmother's caution came swooping down like a hawk upon the fluttering joy-bird in her breast—the bliss of being loved, and by *him*. She must not, dared not cherish it.

She rose to her feet. Her agitation was apparent through all her effort to seem calm. "I thank you sir, for the honour you would do me, for—for the sacrifices you are willing to make for me, but duty forbids that I should purchase happiness at such a price. Our union could only drag you down—cause dissensions and difficulties, bring ultimate misery to both. Your mother would never consent—my grandmother would not. She objects to hasty marriages. She has passed her word for my return, and would not break it for the world." The voice, momentarily proud, dropped to sadness. "And oh, Arthur Wynne, I thought

you too noble to take advantage of a legal quibble for any end !”

He too was on his feet. His heart gave a great bound. Did ever his own name sound so sadly sweet before ? Was this the patient, unresisting Muriel who had submitted to the yoke of her hard taskmistress without revolt ? This fragile creature firmly resisting self, with a code of honour higher than his own.

He took her hands, and she released them. “ My friends will be uneasy ; let us rejoin them,” said she, with a supreme endeavour to appear calm.

He was not disposed to yield so readily. “ Tell me first,” he asked, “ why you feel bound to keep faith with a woman who so grossly broke faith with you ? ”

“ We are answerable to God for our own actions, not for those of others. Mrs. Hopley’s wrongdoing would not justify mine. To her own Master she must stand or fall.” She spoke quietly, with an effort that taxed all her power of self-command, and with a movement towards the horses, already showing signs of impatience. He assisted her to her saddle in silence ; yet, ere he left her side to mount his own, he said, in a subdued and broken voice, “ Muriel, dearest, you say you love me, and in spite of this repulse I must believe you, for the sake of my own peace. If I wait for you until you are released from bondage, will you be my wife then ? ”

The answer came low, but clear ; “ If your friends consent,—yes ! ”

CHAPTER XXV.

SOMETHING RASH.

THE gig horse had been allowed to take its own leisurely pace, whilst Joe Bent expounded his private views with relation to Muriel, which were pretty much those of Lieutenant Wynne ; namely, that he should marry Muriel forthwith, and “ laugh at old Mother Hopley,” as he phrased it.

He had not brought his aunt out solely for the benefit of the air, or the admiration of scenery, and, not having Muriel by his side, endeavoured to turn the drive to account and do a little at courtship second hand, contentedly assuming that his proposal was one to be snapped at.

He had imagined his attentions to have been all along so self-evident, that he was astonished to find that he had taken his aunt very much by surprise; but it ended in his being referred to Muriel herself, subject also to the approval of the people at the Grange, and to her father and grandmother likewise.

He had thought it might be "settled right off."

"I've no fear for the old folk at the Grange, not I," cried confident Joe, "Father'll be glad to see one of us settled down, and as for mother I've heard her wish she'd a daughter like Muriel, scores of times. And I know you've only to put in a good word for me, aunt, and the business is done."

"I think not, Joe," calmly answered Mrs. D'Anyer, "Muriel is easy and unselfish, but she forms her own opinions, and is not to be led in such a matter."

Self-satisfied Joe might have no fears about the people at home, but he saw something in the faces of Muriel and her companion, when they overtook the gig, that rather puzzled him, still he chuckled inwardly with the calm conviction that he would soon put the intrusive lieutenant to the right-about, and forestall his cousin Fawcett. Had he not known Muriel all her life? And had they not been the very best of friends since her return home? He was confident she liked him.

Ay, so she did, but liking is not loving, and he went back to Manchester by the Wednesday evening coach a little wiser, and less confident; and if anyone had been sent to the right-about it was certainly not the lieutenant, though he too had a confidential interview with Mrs. D'Anyer, and was referred back to the heads of families on both sides.

She had never been in a dressmaker's workroom, and the disparity in position created by Muriel's apprenticeship did not strike the little woman as it struck her sensitive daughter.

The "marrying forthwith" had however been expunged from the young Fusilier's programme by Muriel herself, and consequently he awaited his father's answer to his appeal with much more composure than did Sir Madoc and Mrs. Wynne to theirs. He was secure of Muriel's affection, had no doubts of her constancy or of his own, and could wait for the rest. They, on the contrary, became the more irritable, as every day brought fresh proofs of Arthur's defection, and of Miss Pauline's headstrong bias for the dismissed Sir Jenkyn; all the stronger for the opposition it encountered.

Sir Madoc, who had mounted guard over his daughter, and had been kept by that damsel of spirit in a state of mental and bodily activity, inimical to gouty proclivities, absolutely pounced on

the major's letter when David carried it with his chocolate to his bedside on the Thursday morning—David having been charged to watch the arrival of the mail, and obtain the expected missive from the postmaster without delay.

It was laconic if not consolatory.

“Chatham, September, 1796.

“Dear Madoc,—My legal control over my son ceased when he came of age.—Yours,

A WYNNE.”

“Indeed, then we must diplomatisise,” said the spectre of vanity in the wheeled chair when it was shown to her. “Finesse may win where coercion fails. Major Wynne never did see his duty to his wife and son in a proper light. I am scarcely surprised at his apathy now.”

What would she have said had she looked over her son's shoulder as he read his answer from the same pen by the same post?

“Chatham, September, 1796.

“My dear Arthur,—Your sentiments do you honour. I am proud of you. Let Pauline marry whom she will; you are right; she is not the wife for you. A wife's money is a shackle, unless you can count guinea for guinea of own.

“If you live long enough, the Plas and all the entailed estate will be yours without the wife. Cousins should not intermarry.

“Touching Miss D'Anyer, I don't say ‘Ay,’ and I don't say ‘Nay.’

“Though a child when I saw her, she gave promise of future worth. She is *not* beautiful, but I can allow for a lover's rhapsodies, and see the beauty of the soul in a plain face.

“Her present social position is a drawback not to be lightly regarded by a subaltern who hopes to rise; but if, as you say, Miss D'Anyer is *well connected*, it is not insurmountable.

“But, a big *but*, Arthur—don't be in haste. You seem conscious that a poor lieutenant has no right to marry on his pay. Don't let Miss D'Anyer's many virtues run away with your common sense.

“Say nothing until you have seen me, and *do nothing rash*. Commend me to your fair one and to your mother. I am glad to hear she is somewhat better.—Your affectionate father,

ARTHUR WYNNE.”

Along with his father's letter had come his official recall. As he glanced over that sheet he said to himself, “Do nothing rash! My dear father, I already have done something *very* rash. I may

thank my stars the right-minded girl did not take me altogether at my word. Our marriage must have been as precipitate as my offer, had she consented to obtain release as I proposed. It is distraction to leave her, yet in the year's probation what may I not achieve? My captaincy and my mother's consent—of my father's I have no doubt." He was taking the consent of all Muriel's friends for granted, since Mrs. D'Anyer had herself seemed willing, much as Joe Bent had done.

He had only two days to call his own. He must spend the fleeting hours with Muriel if possible, and yet his mother must not have reason to complain of his neglect. So many things had to be talked over and settled. And he could not altogether forget that Muriel's was only a provisional acceptance after all.

He sped across the open promenade in front of the Crescent, called the Gravel, with all haste, hoping to find the D'Anyers among the water drinkers at St. Ann's Well. He found them seated in one of the arched niches outside the small Gothic building, long since superseded, and taking a vacant seat beside Muriel, acquainted them with his recall to Chatham.

"I had been led to expect it any day, but scarcely thought it would arrive so speedily. And, never did the call of duty find me less prepared," he said, looking steadfastly at Muriel, the roses which had bloomed on her cheeks at his approach having paled as rapidly.

"I know not how I shall tear myself away with all so vague and unsettled," he added in a whisper audible only to the one who could not trust her voice to utter a syllable in reply. It seemed as if her new-born happiness was being strangled, and she with it.

Her mother came to the rescue with a commonplace question or two.

"It is very sudden," the girl said at length under her breath, as if the suddenness had taken her breath away. It was only three days since he had asked her to be his wife straightway, and now he was going to leave her; what could it all mean? She heard him explain to her mother, and she heard him express a hope that he should be again stationed at Chester for a time, and as she listened she grew more composed. No one was ordinarily more amenable to the call of duty than herself. On the Monday she had promptly set self aside at its bidding. Nevertheless for three days she had given herself up to the luxury of being loved and cared for, and this was the result. She had no strength to face the coming parting. The solid ground seemed to have slid from beneath her feet, and left her in a state of collapse.

It was the time for her mother's bath, and for once she had to be reminded. Lieutenant Wynne accompanied them to the vestibule, and then, whilst waiting on her mother, she silently took herself to task for her weakness and mistrust.

When an hour and a half later he called for Muriel to take a ramble alone with him whilst Mrs. D'Anyer rested on the sofa, he found her composed and cheerful, much more so than he was himself. Unconsciously they bent their course to the banks of the rapid and pellucid Wye, and, having no gig to bind them arbitrarily to the Fairfield road, they passed the end of the bridge without crossing it, and rambled on by the river side through the enchanting windings of Ashwood Dale, under precipices fringed with feathery ferns, o'erhung with the mountain ash and rich with the tints of autumn, until at length they stood beneath the tall, rugged, weather-beaten grey cliff known as the Lover's Leap, and there they rested, nor cared to round its base, though Sherbrook Dell might have invited them, could the sound of its rushing waterfall have been heard.

It was scarcely an auspicious spot for the exchange of lovers' vows, since the legends of the hoary precipice are sad ones, but its name alone was known to them, and there was little likelihood of intrusion. Muriel had already taxed her weak ankle as far as was prudent, and they sat together, she with her bonnet off, her head upon his breast, his arm around her, on the broken limestone below the towering cliff, forgetful of the flight of time and all but their own absorbing emotions and coming separation.

There, with no witness save a waterousel that hopped upon a stone and perked its saucy head aside as if intent on observation, then dipped into the stream and ran along beneath the surface as if well content, she ratified her promise to be his should he claim her when Mrs. Hopley's right expired; but still she made the promise conditional on the assent of friends, neither argument nor persuasion causing her to waver.

"My father is a very proud man," she said. "He would never suffer me to enter any family where I was unwelcome, and I am afraid grandmother Bancroft would think me too young to wed even a year hence; but I shall never marry anyone else, for I can never love any other as I love you, that is certain." And though the answer did not content him, and he told her she was "cold and cruel," he could obtain no other.

"I am not cruel," she maintained; "but I owe a duty to them, as you to your parents. I cannot promise more than duty to them—and to you—will sanction, much as I may love you."

"But you will wear this for my sake, darling, will you not, as a token of our betrothal?"

"Yes," she whispered reassuringly, as he placed upon her finger an opal ring, in which a lambent flame seemed to play as if it were a tongue of fire, and she accepted it as if it had been a charmed circlet in which both lives were bound. Of any evil omen in the opal as a gift, neither she nor he had a thought, when she added with a smile; "Yes, and if you like, I will break a sixpence with you here by this waterside, and beneath this Lover's Rock, as a witness between us that though time, or distance, or friends may divide us, we will still be true one to the other."

"True one to the other," he echoed, as the thin white coin was snapped in twain; "but you harp on the one string. Why will you only anticipate separation? If you remain constant nothing can divide us, nothing shall divide us," and he tightened his clasp of her form as if to intensify his words.

"Hush!" she murmured fearfully; "we may plan, but only God may control."

"True," he answered; and as he still held her to his heart, there was a solemn and reverent pause—emotion too full for speech. Still he had a sanguine nature, and chid her lovingly for her saddening want of confidence in the future.

It was a trying hour for both of them. They had stood as it were for a brief moment on the threshold of felicity, only to see the portals barred against them and feel dragged asunder by invisible hands, and the kisses they exchanged partook more of the solemnity of parting than of love's impassioned ecstasy.

On the Saturday Arthur Wynne was gone, bearing with him a long silken purse of Muriel's netting, in which the broken piece of silver lay enshrined with a lock of her brown hair; and the sunshine seemed to have gone with him too, for the skies wept as he went, and Muriel could not smile over his departure, try as bravely as she might.

She endeavoured to buoy herself up with the prospect of meeting him ere long in Chester; but Mrs. Hopley and her workroom would come into the picture, and chill her with the fear that to meet him would be almost as impracticable as unwise. She would have to think not only of her own good name, but of his. But howsoever she was torn with the conflict of emotion and duty, she kept a careful guard upon herself; and Mrs. D'Anyer little thought how deep and strong was the current of feeling hidden under the girl's serene countenance and cheerful demeanour. She said little about her lover, or she might have broken down. A crystal locket containing a single dark curl

could have told how her heart beat and fluttered at the mention of his name, and the tongue of flame in the opal ring might have spoken of secret glances and kisses given to the senseless stone had either had a voice.

Wonderful! No sooner had her son taken his departure than Mrs. Wynne condescended to be gracious to Miss D'Anyer. Was it in deference to his farewell entreaty, think you? Nay, that would not have moved her. Was it not rather a touch of her diplomatic art?

She had rejoiced at Arthur's recall, and had bade Sir Madoc rejoice too, as removing Arthur from evil influence and leaving her free "to diplomatisise." But easy going Sir Madoc was getting pretty well tired of Mrs. Wynne's scheming, and of keeping watch and ward over self-willed Pauline, and though he would naturally have preferred to keep the Plas for his daughter and her heirs, he was of a free, frank nature, and more inclined to sympathise with Arthur and Pauline in their resolute determination to choose for themselves, than with Celia Wynne, whom he began to suspect of misleading him.

He bore Sir Jenkyn no ill will until he suspected him of coming between Arthur and Pauline. Indeed, he had hitherto regarded him as a downright good fellow, worthy of his name and his long pedigree; and had been well pleased to greet him in the hunting field or at his own board, where the young baronet's father had of old been wont to take his place, as ready to hold a long controversy over "Gwillim" as to propose a toast, or troll out a Welshman's song in the vernacular.

Whatever Sir Madoc might think with regard to Sir Jenkyn, Mrs. Wynne had no mind to have a mantuamaker's apprentice for a daughter-in-law, she shuddered with horror at the bare supposition, and when after her son's departure she condescendingly bent her head and smiled at Muriel in passing, or at the baths, there was anything but friendliness under the mask.

The following day she ordered Owen to stop her chair as they approached Miss D'Anyer, and without a word of apology for previous neglect, beyond an insinuation that it was her son's fault, expressed a hope that her health was improving, that she enjoyed the change, and the air, and a few like commonplaces, but this always when Muriel was *alone*.

And so, day by day, until the strangeness wore off, occasionally introducing the name of her son; and then bit by bit, in the most natural way possible, first dropping hints and then speaking openly of his long engagement to his cousin, Miss Wynne, of the

Plas, and their contemplated marriage the ensuing spring, accompanied by the patronising regret that Miss D'Anyer would not be in Chester to embroider the bridal robes, and a hope that Arthur would have sown his wild oats before then.

But never, by any chance, did she by word or look give a sign of knowledge of any pretensions that her son might have had to the young girl whose heart she smote so ruthlessly.

These casual words were as the drops that wear the stone; but marble is not easily impressed, and Muriel had a steadfast mind, a clear perception, and a good memory. It goes without telling that these suggestive insinuations that Lieutenant Wynne was playing a double game, amusing himself at her expense as a part of his wild-oat sowing, coming from his own mother must have disturbed and disquieted Muriel; but the clear-eyed, truthful girl saw through the scheming woman, and held fast to her faith in the absent one.

Unveiled in that one painful interview in Mrs. Hopley's show-room, it was in vain for Mrs. Wynne to wear a mask before her now.

Between Pauline, Sir Madoc, and Muriel the poor painted butterfly in the invalid chair had her head and hands full, to say nothing of her sufferings from the presumption of Owen, her maid, whom she had long decided on dismissing—when she could replace her—and only half satisfied with her own cleverness in convincing “that artful baggage of a D'Anyer girl,” she contemplated the condescending patronage of Mrs. D'Anyer, whose ears might be a trifle more accessible.

But she had the habit of talking to herself in her dressing room when alone, or with her maid, which was pretty much the same thing, or she thought so; and Owen, stolid as she might seem, having a better heart than her mistress, had more than once defeated her schemes, quietly and unsuspectingly. Nay, her “presumption” consisted in disapprobation open or tacit.

Old servants who have private or family affairs and secrets in their ken are apt to presume, and the taciturn maid who held the key to all Mrs. Wynne's little flirtations, and could have thrown a light upon the duel which had so nearly left the lady a widow, was sufficiently human to let her silence be felt and to turn it to good uses. And however much Mrs. Wynne might mutter and grumble Owen kept her place, and the mistress stood in some awe of her stolid imperturbable maid.

Now Owen remembered kindly the little maiden who had saved her own limbs in waiting on her wearisome mistress at the Forest House. She loved “Master Arthur,” and could not stand

beside the wheeled chair which Norris propelled, and hear him slandered. She knew of no "wild oats."

So one day she secretly slipped a scrap of paper into Muriel's hand, on which was written "Don't you believe one word against Master Arthur; he is good and true. Her doesn't know what her's saying. Illness turns some folk's heads. Don't let your mother come anigh she."

A grateful look of thanks went straight from the soft brown eyes to Owen's heart, across the fantastic gauze bonnet on the immovable head in the chair, and Muriel's low "I don't," murmured in the woman's ear as she took leave, was answered with a satisfied little nod unseen by the mistress, who had no power to turn round.

Mrs. D'Anyer had left her rheumatism in the baths, and was contemplating a return home in a couple of days, when the Wynnes, and all Buxton with them, had a sort of electric shock.

Diplomacy was defeated.

Sir Madoc was punctilious over his appearance at the breakfast table, when gout or over-fatigue the previous day did not confine him to his pillow. Mrs. Wynne always took her coffee or chocolate in bed.

On one occasion Miss Wynne lazily intimated over-night her intention to follow their example the following morning, protesting that she was so fatigued she thought she should sleep till noon, and was not to be disturbed until she rang her bell.

This was on the evening of a day on which she had drawn her father, nothing loth, to join the Derbyshire hunt, in spite of his years. Whether he had counted on the possibility or not, Sir Jenkyn was also in the field, a very centaur on his high-mettled bay; and once amongst the scarlet-coated huntsmen, he had found it impossible to keep his spirited daughter and her equally spirited admirer apart.

They raced ahead, keeping well together, and leaving the heavier old gentleman to follow with the stragglers; and the old sportsman more admired their daring and spirit than resented it.

Indeed, as he lay resting his weary limbs in bed the next morning, he thought what a fine-looking pair they would make, and how much more pleasant it would be to have a son-in-law within hail than marching after the fife and drum, and being sent to some outlandish place to be carried off by yellow fever or a bullet—to say nothing of Pauline's liking. He had really got tired of galloping after her up hill and down dale, day after day, as she had kept him of late. She positively ought to have a husband to look after her. He thought he should "call back the banished Sir

Jenkyn, and hand her over to his guardianship, and a fig for Celia and her schemes."

Elate and beaming with his benign intention, clean-shaven Sir Madoc sallied from his chamber an hour before noon, dressed with precision, not a speck on his broad-tailed bottle-green coat, his lace cravat and ruffles in perfect order, his shoe and knee buckles bright as his own eyes, his wig carefully powdered, the broad brim of his laced hat buttoned up into its three cocks, and he fully equipped with snuffbox and gold-mounted stick.

Mrs. Wynne had not yet made her appearance, neither had Pauline; at least she was not in the drawing room.

He had no particular desire to see the former; but his daughter—where was she?

Inquiry elicited from the housekeeper that Miss Wynne had taken breakfast at a very early hour in her own room, and afterwards gone out in her riding habit unattended.

Sir Madoc stood aghast. What freak was this?

"Unattended and in her riding habit!" he exclaimed. "And at what hour?"

"Yis, Sir Matoc. Half-past siven, sir, or it might be eight," answered David.

Sir Madoc paced the room from end to end, his perturbation growing with every step, and having no counsellor at hand, he took counsel with his snuffbox; but ten minutes, twenty, half an hour went by, and still Pauline did not return.

Norris was summoned and questioned, and then Owen. No one knew more than he had been told already.

A message went to Mrs. Wynne, and put her in a terrible flutter; then Sir Madoc took a long and vain survey of Stanecliff from the window, no Pauline was there; then betook himself to the public stables with a vague fear of that which he would not shape into words even to himself, lest he should wrong the proud blood of the Wynnes—the blood which was chafing and boiling in his own breast at the bare suggestion of that which he dared not name.

As he surmised, Sir Jenkyn's horse was gone; and gone, too, was that of Pauline. The only question was—whither?

All Sir Madoc's benignity was at an end. He fumed and spluttered, ordered out his own mare intending to go in pursuit, countermanded the order, and made himself a mark for the sly shafts of grooms and underlings with his explosive questionings.

Had Mrs. Wynne been at his elbow she would have said, "Don't make yourself ridiculous, and Pauline generally conspicuous. You want tact, Sir Madoc."

Something like it she did say when he went back to the Crescent with a doubtful sort of hope that there he might find the absentee.

"It is my daughter I want, madam. Can you tell me where I shall find *her*? Don't talk of tact and self-control to me, I say, unless you can."

"Now, my dear Sir Madoc, pray be calm. How can I tell where the dear girl has flown? You cannot think Pauline would do anything rash," half expostulated, half whimpered the tremulous creature, huddled up in a roquelaire, with her curls and cap in a very unwonted state of disarray.

Pausing in his restless walk, and mechanically dipping his finger and thumb into the snuffbox he had nearly emptied in his excitement, he confronted her with, "Calm, madam, calm?" as he snapped down the lid of the box and rapped it smartly with his knuckles; "I say, how calm do you expect a man to be whose daughter has been so rash as to run off with a man she might have had with her father's blessing if she had but waited another day."

"Sir Madoc! You cannot mean it!"

"Yes, I do mean it. But *now*, look you, unless Pauline be here within the hour, I'll cast her off—disinherit her; she shall be no child of mine." And he struck his stick upon the floor with angry force, that startled Mrs. Wynne into a state of nervous palpitation. And again he paced the long room from end to end in a fever of irritable expectation.

But the hour struck, and another, and still there was no sign of either Pauline or Sir Jenkyn.

Sir Madoc was again at the stables. His previous excited inquiries had set tongues wagging. His re-appearance was the signal for fresh comments and suggestions, all pointing to suspicions of a runaway match.

A hunting friend of Sir Jenkyn's suggested "Gretna Green." A groom interposed with a grin, "Neay, they moight get th' job done gradely nigher hant than Gratna Green. They ha' on'y to go to th' church i' th' Peak Forest to get wed wi'out axins or owt."

A bystander confirmed this. "Ay, all the runaways go to the Peak Forest Church to be wed. You see, it's what they call extra-parochial, and has some sort of law of its own."

Then the keeper of the stables recollected that Sir Jenkyn had been asking overnight for a guide who knew the country well. Someone else had seen him in conversation with one of the hangers-on about the place, a fellow named Blackburn, whose

character was none of the best—and the man was missing that morning.

There was no dearth of rough-riding volunteers for the quest now there was a clue, or of guides, and Sir Madoc rode like one possessed. All his kindly intentions had turned to bitterness and exasperation, and his anger intensified with every mile of rough road that shook him in his saddle.

Once at the little hamlet in the heart of the Peak Forest, the simple parson did not need much seeking. He was found in his shirt sleeves, tilling a patch of ground he called his garden. They soon knew all he or the villagers had to tell.

Yes; Pauline Wynne and Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson had been to the secluded church—had left it man and wife. There was an ill-looking fellow with them who had held their horses. They were going back to Buxton through Tideswell, their guide had told a lad.

Told to mislead. A woman they met where the road branched off had seen them strike northward, as if towards Eldon Hole. Two miners had watched them a little beyond that awful and unfathomable chasm with their faces set towards Castleton, and had "wished them well through the Winnats with that fow chap in company."

And here it should be told that the Winnats or Windgates is a narrow, winding, and still descending mountain pass, which constitutes about the last mile of road from Chapel-en-le-Frith towards Castleton, the ancient stronghold of the Peverels. There the cramped-up winds rush and tear along with terrific violence only such stony barriers could withstand, and there, with their heads shrouded in perpetual fog, precipices a thousand feet high frown at each other, and seem to lock the traveller in and shut the sunshine of heaven out. Only necessity or the familiarity of common use could reconcile the lonely traveller to such a route; even to the adventurous tourist the horror of the place made the first view of the vale of Castleton a welcome relief from morbid oppressiveness.

Yet, late in the afternoon, among the windings of that craggy and repulsively-lonely pass of the Windgates, to the shuddering dismay of the seekers, they were found, the luckless bridegroom and his bride—despoiled of all that was valuable; cut, bruised, and ghastly, left with just enough life to fold each other in close embrace and await death, or the miracle of discovery.

A horrified shout from the leaders had told Sir Madoc they were found.

The *how* drove the old man speechless and aghast. There was

an effort made to keep him back, but he would press to the front. And then he was frantic. "Had he driven his darling to destruction." was all his cry.

Brandy flasks were ready, and handkerchiefs to bind up wounds over which the blood had congealed in the cold; coats were freely doffed to shield them from the evening breeze, which there became a blast—for they had been ruthlessly stripped of outer coverings; and horsemen sped on under the frowning crags to spread the alarm and bring assistance.

Helpless and half-insensible, Pauline and her husband were both lifted carefully by strong hands to friendly saddles, and the doubly-burdened beasts picked their way in the waning light down the steep and rough descent to Castleton.

And, oh, the agony of that hour to good Sir Madoc! Wrath had given place to anguish and regret, and loud as had been his bitter denunciations of the headstrong pair, his voice now sank into lamentation and remorse, not unchequered by execrations of Celia Wynne's policy, to which he attributed this catastrophe.

"Had not she blinded me this would never have been. Oh, Pauline, my child, my child!"

So lamenting the grey-haired old baronet kept close beside the stout horseman who had charge of his helpless daughter, ever and anon stretching out his hand to grasp hers and ascertain if warmth and pulsation were there; the hand from which even the new wedding ring had disappeared.

In such wise did the sad procession seek the open door of the humble inn at Castleton, where the motherly hostess was already prepared to receive them, with the village doctor by her side.

They did not die; though at the time the D'Anyers left Buxton, life and death still wavered in the balance, and rumour said recovery was impossible, they had been so woefully maltreated. But even then Sir Jenkyn had rallied to tell how they had followed their guide without suspicion into the rocky pass, until a comrade lying in wait had sprung upon them unawares, and ere he could draw a pistol had struck him with a bludgeon from his seat. Of the after-struggle, indicated by the stained and trampled ground, he remembered nothing, nor did his unhappy bride.

Highway robbery and horse stealing were hanging matters in those days, even when murder was not attempted, and these two unsuspecting young people had certainly been left for dead. Justice was already on the track of the ruffians, stimulated no less by the reward offered by Sir Madoc Wynne than by the blood-money paid by the Crown to the thief taker on conviction.

CHAPTER XXVI.

YOUNG HEADS AND OLD ONES.

"WHY, Ellen, Buxton has made a new woman of thee, and of Muriel too!" was Mrs. Bancroft's opening salutation when they paid the latter a visit on their return home, Mrs. D'Anyer almost as nimble as her daughter.

They had called on Lydia by the way, and had so timed their arrival at Red Bank as not either to interrupt business, or disconcert Margery by a needless re-arrangement of the afternoon tea-table.

When alone, Sarah Bancroft had her tea set on a small round snap table in the big, bright, best kitchen, winter and summer; but Margery knew well that visitors meant privacy and tea in the sitting room; the room so little occupied otherwise since Samuel had made a home for himself elsewhere. The best parlour, on the other side the hall, was reserved for state occasions, and it might be, to find occupation for Margery and her polishing brushes.

Their entrance was the signal for Margery to bring a long brimstone-tipped match alight into the room, and place it beneath the turf and coal already in the bright grate, in order to kindle up a fire, using her check apron as a fan to expedite the process. But no sooner had she carried her linsey petticoat, and blue bed gown (a loose jacket) and white linen mitch out of the apartment, and a faint cup-and-saucer sound was heard from the kitchen, than Mrs. Bancroft, whose first greetings and hand shakings were over—kissing was not universal then amongst women, and she was not one to invite such familiarity even from her own near kin—and who sat down on her high-backed arm-chair watching her daughter disrobe, began abruptly, to Muriel's alarm:

"What's this I hear about Lieutenant Wynne? Joe Bent says he was hanging about Muriel all the while he was with you, and gave no one else a chance of edging in a word. I hope, Ellen, thah has not been encouraging the young officer to come after Muriel, or Muriel either,"—and she spoke with some acerbity.

"And why not?" asked Mrs. D'Anyer, with half timid but very genuine surprise.

"Why not? ask Muriel. She knows why not. Are not we all tradespeople? Such as he don't mate with manufacturers," and she pushed back her grey hair under her mob cap with an impatient gesture.

"So I told him, grandmother ; but——"

"That's a sensible lass," interrupted the old dame. "I'm glad thah remembered my advice," and she patted the "sensible lass" on the shoulder.

"Yes ! but, grandmother," began Muriel again, "he would not listen to me, and he is going to write to you, and I have promised——"

"*Promised !* not to wed him, surely ?" and again the furrowed brow clouded.

"Not without your consent, and that of his own friends."

"Good lass ! good lass ! I wish all young folk were as wise," —a dab at Ellen D'Anyer, which drew forth a heavy sigh from that quarter. "But I hope thy fine lover hasn't made thee too proud to go back to Chester with me next week. And I hope thah can ride outside the coach through Frodsham without fancying thah's a right to every rood of land we traverse, because it belonged to the dead-and-gone D'Anyers hundreds of years back, like that silly father of thine. We had a battle royal over it the other week, and I told him that Muriel's needle he was so much ashamed of would be like to do him more service than the lance of the best of the D'Anyers he was bragging about. Such paltry pride !"

Muriel, carrying off her mother's bonnet and cloak, had escaped this latter ejaculation, with all its accompaniment of infinite scorn ; and her mother having diverted conversation to the terrible catastrophe which had fallen on the Wynnes, she re-entered the parlour, a fresh-looking, comely maiden in a dark blue figured-stuff gown, with lace frills to cover elbows and neck, just as her grandmother was saying, "Blackburn, Blackburn ! I wonder if that's one of Maggy Blackburn's lads. They're a bad lot ; not a bit too good for aught. I only wonder Lydia likes to have the woman about her, however good a nurse she may be. They were suspected of mauling the captain's servant, Norris, I remember. I'll go and ask Sam what he thinks. He's not left the counting house yet. It's a busy time with us, as thah knows."

Whatever Sam thought, he was evidently startled ; but he put his change of colour down to the "shocking affair," and set down as "preposterous the notion that because Maggy Blackburn's lads were a bit wild, and did a little poaching now and then, they should be suspected of anything worse." And as poaching and smuggling were winked at, and connived in by well-to-do and respectable people, the excuse passed muster ; especially when backed by the query why the Cheshire man should be found in Derbyshire ?

If it was anything more than an excuse Sam diverted attention by closing the ledger and hurrying out of the counting house to welcome and congratulate the visitors on their good looks, and to heighten Muriel's colour by jocular reference to the "fancy sweetheart she had found."

But though Margery had brought in besides the mahogany teaboard with its array of blue-and-white china, a pile of those hot well-buttered potato cakes in which his palate delighted, he declined to take tea with them, said Lydia was not well, and would be expecting him; and he must be back before the men had finished their baggin'.*

"Was Lydia ill?" asked his mother curiously, when he was gone, "I think you said you had called there."

"She did not say so," was Ellen D'Anyer's response, "she looked low spirited and weary, but nothing more than usual."

"Um!" was all the comment of the querist. Mrs. D'Anyer went on, "I think she works too hard. Go when you will everything is in order, and so bright and clean you might almost eat off the floors and tables; and no litter, not even the child's doll about. She had just dressed herself for the afternoon, and was making a pinafore. I asked her why she did not come and see us sometimes, and she told me she could not leave the house, Sam would not like it. There were so many rough people hanging about Hyde's Cross and the market, they might be robbed. Then I asked if she did not feel lonely, so much by herself; and why she did not have a servant woman. And I fancy she did not like my question, for she answered—what do you think? 'Hard work was the best cure for loneliness; she had not been brought up a lady, and Sam *could not afford to keep a servant.*'"

"*Sam not afford!*" echoed the old woman with a jerk which shook the frills of her cap. *Sam not afford?*" She was incredulous.

"I don't think Aunt Lydia would say it if Uncle Sam did not tell her so," put in Muriel. "When little Lydia was a baby I heard her wish she had the farm dairy and gardens to go to, everything cost so much to buy."

"Hm! She's a saving body is Lydia; would rather save her money than her bones. She has none of the wants and ways of gentility. And so long as Sam never takes his own friends or customers into the house, I suppose he lets her have her own way. I don't blame her or him for being thrifty. It's best for

* "Baggin", the food a Lancashire operative carried with him in a bag, for refreshment at certain breaks in the long hours of labour.

young beginners—some folk start wrong end first (this was another dab at the D'Anyers;) but I'll ne'er believe *Sam* told her he could not afford to keep a maid. It would be a *lie*!"

And, as if her set face and stern tones were not sufficiently emphatic, she struck the table with a force which made the cups and saucers rattle; and caused Muriel to rise disquieted, and say she would go to the Hargreaves' for half-an-hour, she wished to see Milly.

Mrs. D'Anyer, equally disconcerted, willingly assented, and, just to divert the current of conversation, gave Muriel a message to deliver. But the train of her own thought was, "How soon mother fires up if a word is said against Sam. True as steel she thinks him; and she would neither thank me nor anyone else to show her the rust on the blade."

She little imagined that her mother's very vehemence was the outcome of shadowy suspicions, against which she was fighting and protesting with all the strength of maternal idolatry.

She saw her turn her chair to front the fire, now bright and glowing, and sit silent, looking into it, and brooding, with set brows and close mouth, running her hand mechanically up and down the bright steel chain by which her keys were suspended from her girdle, and, whilst puzzling what had come over her mother, she was too timid to break the silence.

Presently, to her relief, in came Margery for the teaboard, unsummoned, and said, "Missis, yo're wanted i' th' wereheawse."

The magical word broke the reverie, and called the business woman to her feet. "Ay, ay, Margery, I know I'm wanted. These are not times to sit dawdling by the fire."

"Then I'll say good afternoon, mother," said Ellen, quick to take the hint. "I'll go round by the dyeworks to meet Muriel, as you are busy."

"Ay, ay, so thah'd best. And see the lass's things are packed betimes. Good day."

Mrs. D'Anyer met Muriel at the entrance of the dyer's croft, where long pieces of blue and red calico hung from tenter hook to tenter hook by the selvages to drain and dry, in a wavy succession of short lines between post and post.

They were equally surprised to meet.

"Why did you leave grandmother?" asked the one.

"Was not Milly at home?" questioned the other.

"Oh, mother was busy," and I thought I was not wanted." Questions and answers were simultaneous.

"Yes! Milly was at home, but—" and Muriel hesitated, for she hardly knew how to answer—"but we had a little difference,

and I thought I had better come away before it became a great one."

"Quite right, my dear; always avoid quarrelling if possible. But I should scarcely have expected Milly to be disagreeable with *you*. Her love for you has been so earnest."

"She was not exactly disagreeable, mother, but we had a difference of opinion; and she wanted me—well, perhaps it was no great matter after all, and she may forget it by the morrow."

Ellen D'Anyer asked no questions, and the subject dropped. It occurred to her that Milly had been intrusively inquisitive about Joe Bent and Lieutenant Wynne, that Muriel had not felt disposed to answer, and that Milly had been petulant.

Her surmise was correct in part, but only in part. Milly had welcomed Muriel with more than ordinary effusion. She had seen her coming, and rushed to meet her with open arms, clasped her in a close embrace, laughed, yet seemed half inclined to cry, and almost dragged her into the house and up the stairs to her own bedroom in her haste to have her all to herself.

It was a pleasant room, overlooking the croft and the shining Irk, and the flowery uplands beyond the river which the dyer and his confraternity were doing their best to spoil with refuse from the vats. Courtly shepherds and shepherdesses made perpetual love in bowers of marvellous exotics on the printed linen curtains of her four-post bed, on which lay a snowy counterpane of her dead mother's knitting; so no wonder love-making occupied the damsel's dreams by day and by night.

"Oh, Muriel, I have so wanted you!" she cried, "I am so glad you have come. Father's in the parlour shut up with old Stott, with their pipes and ale, hatching mischief, I know. And now take off your things, and tell me all the news." And she laid hands on the clasp of her cousin's cloak.

Muriel checked her. "No, Milly, I cannot stay long. Mother is waiting for me at Grandmother Bancroft's!"

"Oh, never mind them. They won't want you. Let them have their talk, and we'll have ours. I declare, you *are* looking well! I suppose that is due to your new sweetheart more than to Buxton or its springs. Ah! I see it's all true by your colour. Joe Bent came home in a fine taking. I've not seen him: Bob told me." And now it was not only Muriel who blushed.

Milly's colour seemed to deepen strangely as she mentioned Bob.

"I think Joe has made himself unnecessarily communicative, and has said more than he had any right to say; but perhaps I am mistaken. What *did* Joe say?"

It flashed across Muriel's mind that perhaps Milly referred to Joe himself only, and she seated herself quietly in a rush-bottomed chair by the dimity-draped dressing table, whilst Milly leaned against it, her handsome face reflected in the small shield-shaped looking glass thereon.

"Oh, Joe said he found Lieutenant Wynne dangling after you, keeping you all to himself, and looking as if he would cut any other fellow's throat who so much as looked at you. Bob said it was all Joe's jealousy, and that, if the officer had not been in the way, Joe had meant to make you an offer himself; and how delightful that would have been!"

"Would it?" said Muriel, abstractedly, her thoughts flying from the problematic to the actual "offer" made by Joe; but seeing that Joe had kept his own counsel, even from his brother, she was not the one to betray it. Indeed she knew that Joe possessed sterling qualities under his blunt exterior, and she held him in too much esteem to make his honest proposal a subject for chit-chat, however confidential, although she had been compelled to reject him.

Her brief "Would it?" appeared to tantalise Milly, who seemed in a most excitable mood, she answered so quickly "Of course it would. Don't you think it would be pleasanter to have you for a sister-in-law, than have you carried off no one knows where, to live in barracks, or camps, or all sorts of horrible places. But you have not told me anything about Lieutenant Wynne yet. Where did you meet him? What did he say? Is he in love with you? Did he ask you to have him?" and she bent forward eagerly, huddling her questions one on another, and gathering half answers from Muriel's changing countenance.

"How provoking you are! Do tell me something, and then perhaps I'll tell you something. I'm dying with curiosity!"

Muriel laughed. "I think you will survive; but you take one's breath away, and give one no chance to speak. Besides, I fancy you have more to tell than I have—as yet. What do you mean by sisters-in-law? Has Robert won his father and yours over?"

"Hush-sh!" Milly stole to the door on tiptoe, opened it gently, listened at the staircase head, then came in and closed it mysteriously. "Hush!" she whispered, "I don't want father to know!"

"Know what?"

"Well, Muriel, I am dying to tell you, for I really do want your help and advice; I've no one to speak to but you; and oh, I do want a friend!"

Muriel grew alarmed. "What is the matter, Milly? anything your father ought to know?"

"Oh, nothing's the matter, at least—Oh, Muriel you will promise not to mention it to anyone but Bob, if I tell you a great secret?" and she looked as if bursting with some news she longed to communicate.

"I cannot promise that, Milly. I do not care to have secrets. If it is anything I ought to know and you tell me, trusting to my discretion to keep the secret, you can do so. But I cannot make a blind promise and burden my conscience with a secret I might feel it my duty to reveal."

"Oh, Muriel, Muriel, don't be so prim and particular. It is nothing so very dreadful. And you might make the promise. I know you would be sure to keep it if you did," and Milly dropped on her knees before her cousin in earnest entreaty.

Muriel put her arms round her impulsive cousin's neck.

"My dear Milly," said she, "I would do anything to promote your happiness, if I saw how to do it clearly and fairly. But if this secret be something your father may not know, then I would rather not know it; and if it is anything concerning Bob Bent, I think my uncle is the first person to be told."

Milly rose to her feet in alarm. "You won't tell father what I have said? If you do——" and she seemed to tremble with apprehension.

"Certainly not, Milly; it would be a breach of confidence. But pray do not ask me to do more. It troubles me to see you so agitated, for I feel as if there was something afoot in which your father ought to be consulted, seeing that you have no mother to confide in. Robert is too much in love to be a safe guide, at least about anything that concerns you matrimonially. Don't let him lead you away to do or say anything you may repent. I'm afraid he is pressing you to marry him. But, my dear, you are both very young. Why not wait?"

"Wait, indeed! and old Stott closeted with father even now. It's not about carrying, I know, unless it's carrying me off, and he's twenty years older than I am, if he's a day. I hate the sight of him. He's had one wife, and that might content him; and if he wants another, surely there are plenty of women in Yorkshire without coming here for one; and where he's not wanted. But oh, Muriel, you might promise to keep my secret if I told you."

Muriel was steadfast. She shook her head. "I can't, Milly, I can't!"

"Can't, indeed! You might if you would!" and Milly fired up, "it's easy to see what your hollow friendship is worth."

You're growing as hard and as cold as your Grandmother Bancroft, that you are! But you wouldn't be so particular and conscientious if it was your own case, I know."

Muriel rose. She was not inclined to say how nearly it had been her case, or how she had answered an impulsive lover. She made excuses for her cousin, even whilst she felt the injustice of her reproaches. All she said was, "You will think differently when you are more composed, and reflect. And I hope you will come and see me before I go back to Chester;" and, opening the door, she left Milly to cool down.

"Ah," cried Milly, as she went, "Muriel would *not* be so calm if it were her case. And she has gone without telling me one word about the lieutenant. She surely would have told me if he had said anything particular. But there's no knowing those quiet people; they think so much more than they say. Oh, dear, dear; I wish she would have promised."

Yes, the quiet person had thought more than was shown. During her long probation at school and at Mrs. Hopley's she had learned to hide her emotions, nay, as a very child, when the pain of her father's visible dislike was not to be told, even to her mother. And now she was full of distress as she left the dye-works, and took her way between the long lines of swinging hanks of coloured yarn, and flapping folds of ingrain calicoes. She had never had a difference with her cousin before, and now she thought, "What could have made Milly so curious and excitable?" She said I was hard and cold as Grandmother Bancroft. But surely she has never found me hard; and I do not think my grandmother is really hard, if we did but know. She was tender enough to me when I was ill at school. I suppose people always seem hard when they think for themselves and do not agree with others; Milly could not mean what she said. She knows I love her dearly, but she may be inclined to do something foolish; and I was afraid to make so blind a promise. If there be anything she really desires me to know she will be sure to come and tell me, and then I can help her, or advise as well as I am able. Poor girl, she sadly wants a mother. I hope Robert has not tempted her to marry him in secret. It would exasperate the old people, I am sure. I will ask her when she comes. It was something about Robert, I am certain. But hard—hard, does Arthur think me hard *now*? He said I was hard, when I was only striving to do right. Perhaps he may, for I could not express a tithe of my love for him, and I did not dare with all so uncertain." And here her mother came in sight across the fallow fields.

Joe Bent did not show himself in Broom Street, but Robert did, and so did Milly Hargreaves, but Milly's manner was constrained. To Muriel's anxious question if she had been privately married to Bob she gave a curt "No!" but the great secret remained a secret; even from Muriel.

No letter from Lieutenant Wynne had come to either Mrs. Bancroft or Mr. D'Anyer when Muriel went back to Chester, and Muriel's friends were disposed to think him a trifle. But when she was once more in the workroom, and the fair was at its height, Captain Arthur Wynne walked into the Manchester Hall, where Mrs. Bancroft was buying, selling, and bartering her furry wares on a large scale, and John D'Anyer, as erect as if he too wore a military stock, was doing the latter with fustians and smallwares to shopkeepers and other dealers, Irish, Welsh, and English too.

The young officer had already got his company, and was then stationed in Chester as a sub-district for active recruiting. And there being no longer a question of his freedom to marry, he thought he might as well reconnoitre, and ascertain what Muriel's relations were like in their business hours before he sought a private interview with either; not that there was the slightest doubt or wavering in his mind with regard to her.

He did not overlook her position in Mrs. Hopley's workroom, was not blind to the social drawback it might prove to Muriel herself; but he loved her with a fervour and devotion which set all other considerations aside, and was only eager to make her his own as the supreme blessing of his life. Perhaps he thought his wife would be carried so far out of her own sphere, that there was little danger of clashing with her connections afterwards.

With all his impatience and eagerness he had forbore to intrude on his beloved, lest he should do her an unintentional wrong, and before seeking the sanction of relatives, thought it well to scan his ground.

"A fine figure; looks every inch a gentleman," was his mental comment on Muriel's white-headed father, as he strolled round the central area of the hall, less conspicuous than might otherwise have been, since so many peaceful traders had donned the uniform of war. "He looks as lordly over the selling of his goods as if he were marshalling a troop of soldiers. Fortune certainly made a blunder when she set him amongst such merchandise. And what a beau he is! Ah, and there is the good owner of the silver whistle. What a contrast! As blunt and homely as he is polished. She looks more than the eight years older since we met in Delamere." And so ran Arthur

Wynne's cogitations as he mingled amongst the busy stream of buyers, a casual spectator only, unrecognised because in the one case unknown, in the other forgotten.

He was glad to escape from that hall of commerce, where the babel of tongues, the jargon of trade, the mingled odours of various merchandise, fell all unpleasantly on his senses; and it spoke well for his steadfast devotion for Muriel, that his sentiments and intentions underwent no change, so little in unison with his preconceived ideas of respectability was this bargaining and chaffering over goods on a counter. He saw piles of heavy broad goods, heaps of smallwares papered up, but the cabalistic technicalities of the mart were as strange to him as military standing orders would have been to the merchants, and he could scarcely draw the distinction between the sales effected there with other dealers, and the after retail trade over the shopkeeper's counter.

Things are managed differently now, but then there were no cotton lords, nor many merchant princes, and the manufacturer did not disdain to be his own salesman; the gap between the trading community and that aristocratic section which officered our army was wide; though innovation was slowly creeping in, and the scions of noble houses were being uncomfortably elbowed in the messroom and on parade by brother officers whose commissions were purchased by money made in trade.

Later in the day the Captain's servant carried two notes into the Manchester Hall, the result being, firstly, an interview that evening with Mr. D'Anyer at the Plume of Feathers, and another later with Mrs. Bancroft at the Yacht Inn, though privacy at fair time was scarcely obtainable.

He had much less difficulty with the father than with the grandmother, the former being so thoroughly imbued, not to say inflated, with his own renowned ancestry as to see neither condescension nor incongruity in Captain Wynne's overtures for his daughter's hand, but only a rightful recognition of her ancient lineage, the little accident of her apprenticeship notwithstanding.

"Your discernment does you credit, Captain," said he, as they discussed the matter over a choice bottle of port. "My daughter comes of a good stock; there are fair lands in this county over which the D'Anyers once held sway, and if Frodsham and Lyme passed away lang syne through a female branch, and Muriel will bring you no rood of land, she will bring a heritage of pure blood and unstained integrity. The Wynnes—fill your glass, Captain; no heel-taps—the Wynnes may be proud to claim alliance with so fair a specimen of the D'Anyers, though her immediate

progenitors be only fustian and beggars'-inkle* weavers," and the manufacturer of beggars' inkle drew himself up as loftily as if he had worn a casque and plume.

A smile flickered on the young man's lips; but he had noted the implied consent, and taking no heed of family pride, which at another time might have amused him, answered, "I am not a rich man myself, sir; I have little beyond my pay; what I may be in the future is not for me to think of; valued lives, which I hope may be long ones, come between me and natural inheritance, and I seek neither lands nor wealth with Miss D'Anyer, but only her own rich self. I may have seen fairer, I have seen richer women according to the world's estimate, but I have seen none so fully endowed with the graces and riches that will neither fade nor flee, and certainly no lovelier eyes, no sweeter countenance, ever beamed upon mortal man. Her unsophisticated excellences charmed me in the child, their development has enthralled and enchained me in these riper years."

John D'Anyer filled his glass and drained it; he had never fully appreciated his eldest girl. "Um, ah, yes," he said cogitatively, smacking his lips over the new flavour of Muriel's praises rather than the old flavour of the vintage; then launching out into rhapsodies which outdid those of the lover, though he had only discovered the value of the family gem when Captain Wynne proposed for it a new setting.

The young man listened, nothing loth, to parental anecdotes and encomiums of his beloved; but time was flying, he was no wine bibber, and Mrs. Bancroft had yet to be seen. He took advantage of a momentary pause over a refilled glass to say:—

"Then, Mr. D'Anyer, as I presume I have your consent, I would ask how soon I may claim its ratification. It was my desire to make Miss D'Anyer my wife in time to free her from her bondage to that woman in Watergate-street"—he never spoke over-respectfully of Mrs. Hopley—"but the dear girl absolutely refused. I hope——"

What he hoped was interrupted by John D'Anyer, who, pulling himself up to his full height, exclaimed:—

"And what could you expect, sir, but an absolute refusal from my daughter? If that self-willed, hard-headed old grandmother of hers, who fancies, because she has a few thousands to dispose of, that the whole family must be under her control, and fall down and worship her—if that foolish old woman, who fancies herself wise, did carry off our Muriel from her proper place in

* Beggars' inkle was the commonest kind of tape, such as cooks bound round fillets of veal and rounds of beef.

her own home to serve a stranger, and coerced me into acquiescence, it shall never be said that John D'Anyer connived at breaking a bargain into which he had once entered, however bad a bargain he may find it. My honour, sir," and he struck his breast, "forbids me to break my bond. Twelve months hence you have my consent to claim my daughter, until then she must remain where she is."

"But, sir——"

"But! There is no 'but' in the case, Captain. If you are not inclined to bide the conditions, I retract my consent. The man who is not willing to wait for my daughter, sir, is not worthy to possess my daughter, sir. Good Heavens! you don't suppose you are the only suitor for my daughter's hand? If you will not wait, there are others who will, my——"

Arthur Wynne hastened to assure him that he accepted his terms, hard as they were, rather than risk the withdrawal of his favour, and after a few more words of conciliation to the man who had so suddenly become aware of "my daughter's" worth, he shook hands and took leave, in haste to keep his other appointment; not, it must be confessed, without some inward qualms. It was no easy task to assume composure whilst in a state of feverish excitement; and his remembrance of the threatened rupture between Muriel's grandmother and the Kingsleys did not suggest the fittest auditor of a love story.

"I protest I could go into battle with more nerve than meet this formidable old dame," he murmured to himself, as he shouldered his way into the Yacht, and inquired for the furrier from the host.

Mrs. Bancroft had secured a quiet nook for their conference, though it was little larger than a closet. Conciliated by the young man's deference to his elders, she greeted him cordially and inquired after the Major and Mrs. Wynne, and so far put the young captain at his ease. But he soon found he had a strong and independent will to deal with. She did not beat about the bush, and she was much more practical than her son-in-law.

"And so you want to marry my granddaughter Muriel? Well, I liked you when you were a lad, and I don't dislike you now, but I do dislike your trade. There have been nothing but wars and rumours of wars for years upon years, till my old head is ready to split with the squeak of the fife and the bang of the drum. Every lad in Manchester that can handle a musket flings off his working gear to play at soldiering, and poor women and children and peaceful traders are the sufferers. And I don't like

unequal matches; and however John D'Anyer may boast of his blue blood and his pedigree, the match would be unequal."

"Oh, Mrs. Bancroft," he began—she held up her thin brown hand to silence him.

"I say it *would* be unequal; you are the heir of the Wynnes, and your lady-mother would be sure to cast up to my grandchild that Muriel had made dresses for herself and her fine friends." Her keen eyes saw him wince. "Ay, you know that is true; ay, and though I intend Muriel to have three hundred a year from the day she marries, if she marries to my liking, belike my lady would hold her nose at the money because it came out of my skin sheds. And I'd rather Muriel had set her mind on a plain tradesman's son, one not too proud to take my share of the business off my hands and go into partnership with my son Sam when I throw up the reins. But there's no controlling young folks' likings, and I've a notion the lass had set her mind on you long before she knew it herself."

Arthur Wynne brightened. This seemed more promising.

"I know I loved *her* long before *I* was conscious of it," he put in eagerly.

Without noting the interruption, she went on:

"Now, I dare say you wonder why, being able and willing to give Muriel a wedding portion, I should bind her to Mrs. Hopley. Do you think I wanted to make a mantua-maker of the lass? Nought o' th' sort, though where there are three or four lasses in a family a good needlewoman comes handy. But I brought her here to school, and bound her 'prentice, just because she was put upon at home—was at everyone's beck and call, was snubbed and kept in the background, and neither her mother nor herself had the spirit to stand against it; for where John D'Anyer sets down his foot, they are ready to kiss the ground. She's good-looking enough now, and her eyes are clear as wells, and I dare say John will be proud of her *now*; but *then* he had taken a dislike to the child because illness had half-blinded her and spoiled her beauty. She came the first and was put last, and I found that she was conscious it was on account of her seamed face. Her sisters rode rough-shod over her, even when they were little ones, and John encouraged them. Many a girl would have rebelled, but Muriel was like her mother, as soft as my pocket, and would scarcely have cried out if they had knocked her down and wiped their feet upon her. But I'd no mind the willing horse should do all the work, so I said I'd see about it—and I did. I saw first that she had a good education—and none can deny that Miss Briscoe was a good teacher—and then put her, as I thought, with a motherly

woman who would treat her kindly and teach her something useful." Then, after a pause—Sarah Bancroft was reluctant to confess a failure—"I'm free to own I made a mistake."

"A great one," murmured Captain Wynne under his breath, but her quick ears caught the import.

"Ay, and I'll see I don't make another. I'll make the dear lass happy if I can; but I've a notion her heart's too tender to be happy as a soldier's wife in war time. I suppose you wouldn't like to sell out, if I——"

He interrupted her :

"Sell out—at such a crisis! My dear madam, I should be scouted as a coward!"

"Ah, well! so I suppose. But there's no knowing what may happen before the year's end, and there can be no wedding before that. So come to me then, either here or at my place on Red Bank, Manchester, and I'll see what can be done then."

This was tantamount to consent, or he took it as such, shaking hands with the old dame very gratefully as he left the inn. But he did not forget to say, "I presume there can be no objection to my meeting Miss D'Anyer occasionally whilst stationed here? The probation would be unendurable otherwise."

And her answer was: "Well—a—I'll see about it."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MILLY'S SECRET TOLD.

A WEEK is a long time for an impatient lover to wait for a sight of his beloved when she is close at hand, and only a hard-hearted door between himself and happiness; but when that week is superadded to several other weeks of absence, the delay is irritating. It would have been more natural and satisfactory for Arthur Wynne to rush off to Muriel and print on her lips the consent he had won from her father and grandmother, than to sit down to his desk in the barracks and pour out his heart and his tidings on paper, and long like some working man for the Sunday which would set his sweetheart at liberty to meet him. But he had no alternative.

He sent his letter by a messenger. The answer came back verbally. The young lady was engaged—was too busy to write. Would be with her grandmother on Sunday.

He set his teeth and paced more impatiently the Watergate Row in which he had awaited her answer. It was certainly a mortification to his pride. And it was more than that; it told how close her bonds must be, and set him longing more and more to burst them.

Yet it was strange that he, a soldier, upholding the necessity of army discipline, should so chafe at the discipline Mrs. Hopley enforced.

Mrs. Bancroft had informed him that no more Sunday work would be imposed on Muriel, she having threatened the mantua-maker with the pains and penalties of the ecclesiastical court in such case; and that on those days Muriel might be seen. She had driven Muriel over to Wrexham the previous day to visit some old friends, and the following Sunday the girl would spend with her and her father. The captain could join them if so inclined.

Meantime, the energetic old dame betook herself to Mrs. Hopley's, and a somewhat stiff interview was that between the pair. Mrs. Bancroft's previous threat yet rankled in the other's breast.

Alike careful of her grandchild's reputation and conscious that Captain Wynne was not of the mettle to submit tamely to total separation from the maiden he sought to make his wife, she came with a proposal that Mrs. Hopley should open her doors to him at convenient seasons, it "not being fitted that her grandchild should meet her sweetheart" (the old woman clung to the good old word) "in the highways and byways."

"They don't meet under this roof," was Mrs. Hopley's decided rebuff. "Mrs. Wynne is a customer of mine, and I don't choose to sacrifice her patronage by countenancing her son's courtship of my apprentice."

"If all I hear be true, it's little patronage you are likely to have again in that quarter. There has been a quarrel between Sir Madoc and Mrs. Wynne, and so long as *he* lives she is not likely to cross the threshold of the Plas again. He blames her for all that has befallen his daughter—for her runaway wedding with Sir Jenkyn Jenkinson, and all."

Mrs. Hopley opened her eyes and mouth in sheer astonishment. "How did you hear this? Did the young captain tell you?"

"Not he! He's too much a gentleman to prate of his family affairs to strangers. Nay, it's the common gossip of Buxton. Folk don't quarrel in whispers, be they gentle or simple. The news came to me through a customer of mine."

She did not think it needful to add that Muriel had lodged in

the house of that customer, or that Arthur Wynne's visits there had caused the shopkeeper to retail the gossip.

Still Mrs. Hopley did not seem inclined to give in. She thought she had the whip hand of Mrs. Bancroft, and determined to show it,

"Well, all that's no business of mine; my respectability is. I'm not going to have military gallants hanging about my place to disgrace us. No Captain Wynne comes here to see an apprentice of mine, be she who she may."

"Suppose I give my consent to his marrying her right off, as he wants to do! Where then would you be?" put Mrs. Bancroft with a decisive nod.

Mrs. Hopley looked aghast. The whip had changed hands.

Mrs. Bancroft continued: "I had passed my word for her return, and the lass was too good to make me break it, or she might have been Mrs. Wynne now; and then where would you have been?"

"Indeed!" replied the mistress of the robes. "That alters the case. I was not aware Miss D'Anyer was so conscientious. In that case, I think she may be trusted to meet the captain—occasionally. And—and—well, he can call for her, and take her to church, and bring her back if so disposed—*occasionally*."

She was in reality glad of a ground on which to make her reluctant and not very liberal concession without compromise of her own position, since she saw in Sarah Bancroft's manner a resolve to make her words good: and Muriel was far too profitable an apprentice to be parted with, even if she had not determined to keep her, in a spirit of bravado. It had dawned on her that Sir Madoc was old, and that some day Captain Wynne might reign at the Plas. It was best to be obliging.

Glad enough was Arthur Wynne for the recognition of his suit implied in that invitation to meet Muriel in the presence of her relatives; but he was scarcely so grateful to Mrs. Bancroft as he might have been for making terms with the dressmaker for the privilege of meeting his future bride. He had the grace to thank the old dame, nevertheless, for her good intentions, but he felt that there had been a blow dealt at his family dignity. It was only when he looked at Muriel that he forgot it.

That meeting in the presence of their elders was embarrassing for both, and might have been more so had not John D'Anyer, with mingled courtesy and good feeling, contrived to set them at ease after the first greetings.

Wine and fruits were on the table, and both he and Mrs. Bancroft, with old-fashioned hospitality, pressed their guest to

partake; then John D'Anyer introduced politics and the new volunteer service as topics of conversation; then talked of the captain's own duties in Chester, which appeared to be neither few nor light; there was the inspection, attestation, and enrolment of the batches of recruits as they were brought in by the sergeants. There was the mustering, and drilling, and clothing, and he was answerable for all under his command.

Then either he or Mrs. Bancroft began to speak of Buxton, and of the accidental meeting of the young officer and Muriel, and from her place on the window seat Muriel put in a few words now and again; but Arthur, who seemed to hang upon her syllables, thought she turned her eyes anywhere but towards him. Only once her glance encountered his, and then the warm blood suffused her cheek, and the brown eyes were lost to him again.

Presently, to his relief, John D'Anyer expressed his intention to go downstairs and smoke a pipe with the landlord in the bar, and soon after Mrs. Bancroft was afraid she had not packed everything in her saddle bags.

What a delicious half hour was that in which the lovers were alone for the first time since they had gained the goodwill of their friends. The window seat was wide enough for two, and, all the formality of the time notwithstanding, the head which the sunset brightened like an aureola rested against his manly breast, as if there was all her world.

What to her was a year, what to her the long hours of stitchery, so long as he loved her and was there to tell her so, and to tell her too how proudly her father had spoken of her; how will'ng his own father was that he should make his own choice of a wife?

All her troubled past seemed to drift away from her in the fulness of her joy, and she silently thanked God for the true heart he had given her, and for the promise of the future.

Ah, that future, how bright was the pencil with which Arthur pictured it; his own uniform had no richer hues. He was so sanguine; so overbrimmed with love's ecstasies. And if he pressed his lips to hers as though they were the lips of a saint, yet was the saint all his own.

Only half an hour, and so much yet unsaid! By whose ruthless orders was the teaboard sent in to cut the precious moments short, and bring back all the commonplace realities of food and people?

No prouder lover ever parted from his betrothed than Arthur Wynne when he left Muriel at that door with the brass plate, where he had once before left her so differently; and he carried

away with him the sweetly-perfumed sprig of late jessamine she had worn that day in her bosom, to be kept as a memorial along with the spray of eye-bright he had preserved as a relic so long.

No happier girl than Muriel laid her head upon a pillow that night, albeit only of hard flock in a barely-furnished attic, where was no privacy, even for prayer. How was it that in the midst of her delight she thought so much of Milly Hargreaves, and wondered what her unrevealed secret could be, hoping too that much happiness might be in store for *her*?

It would have taken the bloom off her own delicious satisfaction could she have looked behind the love-making shepherds and shepherdesses on Milly's curtains, and seen the tear-stained face that tossed from side to side among the soft pillows from which rest was banished.

The day that had been so full of hope and joy for Muriel and Arthur had dashed the cup of hope from the lips of two others equally as fond.

In the midst of the morning service at the Manchester Collegiate Church that Sunday, there might have been seen a movement in two pews when the long string of banns were read out, and two heads held up erect, as if all ear. The one the head of a rough, well-to-do individual whose Sunday suit sat on him with an unaccustomed air, whilst his hands bore testimony that the dyes he used were "fast colours;" the other a man of more gentlemanlike bearing; neither members of the congregation.

The names of Milly Hargreaves and Robert Bent slipped over the rough tongue of the eccentric chaplain, Joshua Brooks.

At once the two men rose from their seats with the simultaneous cry, "I forbid the banns," and all eyes were turned upon them, for they were well-known men in the town.

"Yo' must come into th' vestry at th' close of th' service, and there state yor objections," proclaimed Joshua from the pulpit, and went on through his list of names and the remainder of the service as coolly as if two young hearts in the congregation were not beating like muffled drums.

The two fathers had the same plea: the candidates for matrimony were "under age."

"Well," said the parson, "they'll mend o' that, if there be no other impediment."

"I have other views for my son, and I forbid these banns," said Charles Bent stiffly.

"And so have I for my Milly, so we're quits, Mr. Bent. Though if your son had come to me and bid fair for the lass, straightforward and up-and-above board, there's no saying but

what I might have been tempted to listen, and lay down guinea for guinea with you to set the young folk going. But *now*, he shouldn't have her if every hair of his head were tagged with a diamond, the mean, sneaking cur."

"Hush! hush! Remember where you are! If you must quarrel, let it be outside the church," interposed the clergyman; but Charles Bent, with a scornful curl of lip, and a muttered something that sounded like having "no mind to let Bob grope for guineas in a dye vat," had already turned to depart.

"Tak' care th' young limb o' th' law doesn't grope for guineas in dirtier places," James Hargreaves shouted after the blue-coated gentleman across the churchyard, little caring who heard him.

And so the two fathers separated and went their way, well content with their morning's work, although they had wrecked two young lives.

Robert Bent and Milly, there to hear the banns from an obscure corner, had hurried from the old church together, scarcely pausing as they went past the Grammar School and turned down Mill Brow over the wooden bridge across the Irk, out of the way of the curious throng. Owners of the garden plots which overlooked the river, smoking their pipes at the doors of their little summer houses, or gathering sweet-scented posies, cast their eyes on the discomposed pair, nodding significantly to each other, or pointing with their pipe stems, but Milly and Robert went on, in too much trouble to heed them. They struck across the rising ground, known as Walker's Croft, now cut up by railway lines and stations, but then the home of the daisy and the dandelion, and under a clump of trees in the rear of that Caledonian colony still yclept Scotland, there was a passionate parting of the cousins, who were never to be more than cousins, though they vowed fidelity and constancy to their lives' end.

There was an angry scene at the Horrocks's when Milly stole into the house where her father was waiting to taunt her with treachery and duplicity; and to speak that of her lover which sounded like treason in her ears.

He was neither choice nor kind in his language; seemed to have no compassion for the motherless girl who had rarely wiser counsellor than her own will; and wound up with the declaration that she needed the restraint of a husband old enough to look after her, and he meant her to have one too, who would take her without a shilling; not a chap dependent on his father, who was not out of his articles. He bade her, with an oath, put all romantic nonsense out of her head, for he had promised her to

John Stott, and John Stott she must have, or she might go a-begging, and try how that would suit her ladyship.

At the name of John Stott, Milly put her trembling hands up to her head as if to shut out the hateful sound from her ears, and with a passionate, despairing cry that she would "drown herself," rushed out of the house towards the river.

Quick as light her father was after her. His strong hand gripped her gloved arm like a vice, and brought her, struggling, back.

She was urged up the stairs before him to her own room, and there he locked her in, to throw herself upon the floor and wear her strength away in hysterics—unheeded and alone.

And so the midday passed on, and the night. The door was locked, and James Hargreaves kept the key. No one came near with food or light, and the morning dawned, and another day reached its meridian before her father thought proper to open the door and ask if she had come to her senses.

Romantic, loving, weak, she was unable to contend with the determined will of her father; she could answer only with sobs—sobs for herself and the Robert she knew she had lost.

Her "great secret" was told to all the town, and a sorrowful secret it was for both of them.

Robert Bent did not turn up either at the office or the Grange for upwards of a week, a week spent in reckless dissipation. And then Joe, who had a sort of fellow-feeling for his brother's disappointment, sought him out and induced him to go home. There, nothing was said to him one way or other. But he was never the same Bob Bent again.

It appeared that he had counted on the absence of his uncles and others from the Old Church during Chester Fair to get the banns published without observation. His uncle James Hargreaves attended the new church of St. Michael not far from his own works. Milly could easily make an excuse of a visit to the D'Anyers to sit out the third reading.

But one of those busybodies whose ears are always open, and who must thrust their dirty fingers into other people's pies, had taken care to be first with the news, and "congratulated" both the dyer and the cotton spinner on the coming bridal; at least Robert Bent denounced the informant as a busybody.

Possibly, had Robert gone to his father and her father in the first instance, though there might have been some demur, they might have been won over in time, for Milly was an only child, her father a man of means, and the Bents were reputed rich. The rash and premature act which took the grace of choice from

their elders, irritated, exasperated, and shut out all hope of concession.

Milly looked blankly out on the future; Robert, with an obstinate rebellious intention to be the victor in the end. "Only wait until I am of age," he said to himself, as he had said to her.

Time does not travel empty handed, but he rarely brings us what we expect or what we crave.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANOTHER SECRET OUT.

THE Monday morning that beheld Milly Hargreaves tossing on a sleepless pillow, saw Sarah Bancroft setting off from the Yacht Inn comfortably and complacently; her business done satisfactorily, her favourite grandchild in a fair way to a happy marriage with the man of her choice; a man who would lift her up, not drag her down. She had not felt so blithe for many years. There had been a slight frost during the night, and the air was crisp and exhilarating. There was no breath or shadow of any trouble or scandal brooding over any of her family connections however remote. She was at ease with the world and with herself.

Business people with large sums of money about them travelled in company for mutual security when practicable. She was mounted on horseback as usual, accompanied by the warehouseman who attended her in the absence of Samuel, an old servant named Cutts, and made one of the Manchester party travelling homewards, which also included her brother-in-law, Solomon, and John D'Anyer, who beguiled the way with an interchange of opinions on the threatened invasion by the French, and its effects on the commerce of the country, not unaccompanied by denunciations of French goods, even brandy, seeing that it was scarce and dear; and that empty flasks necessitated a stoppage at the Kelsall roadside inn for draughts of ale in lieu thereof.

How was it that that brief stoppage for refreshments, of which she did not hesitate to partake, as they did, without quitting the saddle, took all the buoyancy out of her? Was it because the inn reminded her of the serving man Norris, who had been carried there wounded so many years before? or what?

The turnpike road was lively with groups of mountebanks, showmen and their caravans, and other horsemen and conveyances

at the breakup of the busy fair. She was anything but a timid woman, and it could not be fear of her own safety or that of her cash that brought up to her mind with recurring vitality from the moment she entered Delamere her own commonplace remark to Arthur Wynne, "There's no knowing what may happen before the year comes to an end."

She tried to shake it off, but it would not be shaken off, though she talked business to her man as she jogged along, nodded to people as they passed, and exchanged opinions on trade or war with her travelling companions.

But Sarah Bancroft was not on the lookout for presentiments, and if she brought her silver whistle nearer to her hand when they reached the spot where the by-road branched off towards Eddisbury, near Hind's Well, and she took leave of her home-going friends, it was but a matter of customary precaution, not of fear that anything would happen.

There was no need for the whistle. Nothing crossed their path more formidable than a scurrying hare or rabbit, nothing met or overtook them but a turf cutter with a couple of laden donkeys, and a child with a bundle of faggots. Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley received her with open-handed hospitality as of old; Doctor Holmes and his daughter had been invited to meet her; his partner, Asa Booth, shortly to marry Lucinda Holmes, was to join them later on, as an escort home through the forest; there was a savoury dinner smoking on the board by the time she had got rid of her travelling gear and the roadmarks; there was much to ask and much to tell, for here was Miss Holmes about to marry, and Muriel was under promise.

And, being comfortable, Mrs. Bancroft settled herself down for an afternoon's enjoyment, leaving business, contrary to custom, for the morrow. Happen! What should happen?

Dinner was over, Mrs. Bancroft was seated in a cosy easy chair on one side of the fragrant and popping wood fire, the two men on the oak settle opposite were puffing away at long clay pipes, with a couple of tankards of home-brewed ale on a small round table before them.

Mrs. Kingsley had drawn a high-backed chair of black oak close to her old friend, Miss Holmes had placed herself in a window seat, and from a crimson leather reticule produced some light needlework, and Mr. Kingsley was jocularly asking if that was for the wedding, when there was a sort of scuffling noise outside, and in rushed a boy about eight or nine years old, in a rough suit of corduroys, with thick clogs, his hair in a tangle, his face grimy and streaked with the course of tears.

For an instant only he stood abashed by the presence of strangers, then darted up to Mrs. Kingsley, who had risen, and clung to her skirts as he cried out, "Oh, Mrs. Kingsley, what's to be done, what's to be done? Constables have bin an' takken Bill an' Moiles to gaol, and they've pulled oop th' floors an' brokken down th' chimbley, an' they've found o' soorts o' things; an' Mammy Blackburn shrieked, an' hoo's gone to Manchester to get summat as they call bail, an' albi;* and I'm frightened; an' oh, Mrs. Kingsley, wheere am I to go, and what am I to do?" and, his outburst over, he broke down in childlike sobs.

At the first sound of his voice Mrs. Bancroft had gripped the arms of her chair, half rising, her keen eyes fixed upon his face, as though she would trace its every line. As he ended she stood upon her feet, erect and stern, and in a voice hard and imperative demanded, "What boy is that?"

Mrs. Kingsley looked at her husband, but no one answered.

The question was repeated: "Whose boy is that, I ask?"

Mrs. Kingsley had a spirit to match Sarah Bancroft. She caught the boy by the hand, and, as if glad to throw off a burdensome secret, marched him up to the old woman's chair, with the words, "Well, Mrs. Bancroft, it's quite time you knew who that boy is. He's your *grandson*; your Sam's firstborn! Lydia and Sam were married full three years before you thought they were."

Mrs. Bancroft had stood like one frozen to stone whilst this was said.

"Is this true?" she asked after a while, in a sort of chilled undertone.

"True enough," struck in the forester, "I saw them myself coming out of St. Olave's Church, Chester, and I had the curiosity to go in and see what took them there, and to look at the register, though I had to pay for the sight. And the book's there for you to look at too, dame, if you're hard of belief."

She took no note of the child, who still clung to Mrs. Kingsley; her only comment—in the same dry, hard tone—was, "And Farmer Bradley?"

"Farmer Bradley knew no more than you, Mrs. Bancroft, till Mr. Samuel came at Christmas to fetch his wife, and they had to show the marriage lines, and there was a fine rumpus."

"But the boy—the farmer must have known?"

"Poor lad, he was born at Maggy Blackburn's, and there in the heart of the wood Maggy nursed him, and there he's been ever since, and she's behaved none too well to him, though she's

*Probably alibi.

been well paid to keep the secret. Very much better than she deserved. And he's never seen mother nor father save once in a while. Though I did hear that Lydia was breaking her heart about him."

"And you—you—my own old friends, have let me come and go, and never warned me against the treachery I was fostering; have let *my grandson* be reared among wretches like the Blackburns, and never breathed a syllable to save him from contamination," and the old woman ground her teeth in bitterness.

"Nay, nay," quoth the forester; "blame your own son, not us. 'Twas his fault, and his business, not ours. We're no mischief makers. My dame's done the best she could for the lad; he's lived here half his time. He was only sent back yesterday for fear you should see him!"

"For *fear*!" she echoed scornfully. "Come here, lad" (to the boy). "They say thah belongs to me, and there's that in thi features and in thi voice that tells me it is true. Go and wash thi face and come back here. I am going to take thee home with me. Do you understand?"

The boy understood vaguely, but her aspect was not inviting. He did not stir; he only stared and clung to Mrs. Kingsley.

She stooped and kissed the dirty face. "Jem, go to your grandmother; she will take you to see your mammy in Manchester."

Jem's eyes expanded. "Wull she?" he interrogated. "Then I'll go."

And without another word he clattered off, to return in a short time with a clean face and the hair, which had resisted the tugging of a comb, plastered down with water.

But Sarah Bancroft was off. Gone to have the horse saddled, and the man looked up for a sharp gallop to Waverham. She had business on hand of more moment than the buying of skins. There could be no more sleeping under a roof where Sam's deceit had been hushed up, hidden from her; nay, for aught she knew, mayhap connived at. Treachery, treachery, wherever she turned! And Sam—Sam of all the world! It wrung her heart to think of it all. But she'd see to it!

Dr. Holmes and Lucinda had held aloof from this strange scene, but no sooner was she gone than tongues were loosened, and the probable consequences of this discovery discussed very freely, all agreeing that it was a good thing it had not been deferred until the lad was older; a good thing for him and for his mother too. They were not so sure about Mr. Sam. Then the boy himself was told to count himself fortunate, and to be a

good boy, and go with his grandmother like a brave little man, and he should come back and see them all some day.

An underkeeper had been despatched to Waverham and Maggy's cottage for news, but Sarah Bancroft was back before the man. She was not communicative, and she peremptorily refused to alight, but she gave the little fellow Jem a shilling as an inducement to quit the Kingsleys, and allow himself to be placed on the saddle in front of her warehouseman.

"I don't like the set of the old woman's face," cried the for-ester when she was finally gone and the boy with her. "It bodes no good to Mr. Samuel; and serve him right, for she's been a good mother to him, though something hard in her ways. But, hard as she looks, Sarah Bancroft has a soft place in her heart."

"I only wish she had let little Jem feel it," was the sharp commentary of his wife. "If she'd given him a kiss instead of a shilling, the little lad's heart would have opened, and he'd have gone away without a whimper. But it's my belief Sarah Bancroft keeps *her* heart in her pocket."

"Wherever she keeps it, wife, she's found room there for the poor neglected little chap. 'I've no mind he shall suffer for the sin of his father,' she said to me before she went. 'And whatever I do I'll bring him up to fear the Lord, and then perhaps he'll honour his parents.' Think of that from *her*!"

Night had fallen, and rain was falling when Sarah Bancroft and her escort left the forest behind and neared Northwich.

It was not possible to proceed that night. Weary with more than her long ride or her weight of years, the careworn woman was glad of an excuse to seek the privacy of her solitary couch, even at an inn. Supper she could not eat, though she saw that little Jem was well fed before she consigned him for the night to the charge of Cutts, her man.

She had warehouse business likewise with a shopkeeper in Northwich that kept her for an hour or two in the morning; and then she called on Dr. Holmes to question him concerning Maggy Blackburn; but the doctor could tell her no more than she had learned on the spot. Money and jewellery had been found secreted under the floors, numbers of little bones were said to have been dug up in the garden; and the woman had disappeared to avoid capture on her own score.

By this time there was necessity for a substantial luncheon, if not for herself, at all events for the others, and the delay retarded their appearance in Manchester until the lamplighter was going his round with ladder and flaring oil-can, to the wonder and delight of country-born Jem; and all that time his grandmother's

grief and indignation had been gathering force, seething and fermenting in her silent breast.

At Hyde's Cross she alighted. The man was sent home to Red Bank with the horses and saddle bags. They, with all the gold in them, were as nothing to her now. She could not allow her purpose to cool.

Whatever that purpose was, her features were so set and hard that little Jem instinctively shrank as she put forth her hand. He had been used to blows, and looked for one; but it was not for a blow, it was only to close upon his in a tightening clasp.

When Mrs. Bancroft turned the handle of her son's door in Toad Lane, and sent the boy, clogged and hatless as he was, into the house before her, she only added to a scene of previous commotion, and in a sense brought relief both to Sam and Lydia.

It has been already told that the house was an old black and white timber-and-rubble building, with overhanging storeys, and the door, from which ran an oaken screen or "spear," opened into the main room or house place. At the end of this spear stood Maggy Blackburn with her arms akimbo, the hood of her grey cloak thrown back, leaving her sharp profile clearly defined against the firelight, and adding by her body to the length of the screen.

There was no need of Mrs. Bancroft's grip on Jem's shoulder to draw him back; the sound of Maggy's uplifted voice sent him shrinking closer into the shadow to clasp his less formidable grandmother's hand for protection. The opening of the door, their footsteps, even Jem's clogs, were unheard in the altercation going on.

"An' you *dare* tell *me* yo wunna go bail or to get up an aliby for my lads again! But if yo dunna, Sam Bancroft, an yo wunna swear they were moiles away from Darbysheer that noight, I'll go roight away to Red Bank an' let out the saicret I've kept so long o'er that lad o' yors that Lydia's bin pinin' o'er so long."

The stroke of the ignotus is not more paralysing than was the touch of Sarah Bancroft's hand on the woman's sinewy arm, or the sight of the boy, on whom Lydia flung herself with a sobbing shriek.

Bold Maggy seemed to collapse and cower as the other's wrathful voice was heard; and Sam stood aghast—dumbfounded.

"Thah vile wretch, how dare thah urge my son to stain our honest name with perjury, to go bail for murderous ruffians like thy sons? It's time *they* had their deserts, and no magistrate in the county would take bail for a crime like theirs. Out of the house this instant, before I send for a constable! I know all the

secret thah's kept so long, and *how* you have kept it, and *more besides*—I'm fresh from Waverham, Maggy Blackburn." And the little woman's keen eyes looked the other through.

"Maybe other folk's sons will get their deserts afore long!" hissed Maggy through her set teeth, as she edged herself off behind the spear and darted off into the street without another word. She knew the danger of waiting for a constable.

"Yes, Sam, other folk's sons *will* get their deserts afore long. The boy is *mine*. Thou hast repudiated him, left him to perish soul and body. I shall provide for *him*. But I have done with *thee*. I shall dissolve the partnership—wind up the business. Thah will have thy share; nothing more. And don't thee show thy face at th' works again, or it'll be worse for thee. Come, Jem, we are going home. Lydia, thah can see thi boy when thah likes."

And home she took him without further parley, utterly refusing to listen to Sam's blundering attempt at excuse, buying the lad shoes and cap by the way, and leaving Sam to rub his thighs and reflect.

She too reflected, and remembered that the woman had said "go bail *again*." What could that mean? Was he so afraid of his mother that rather than reveal his forbidden marriage he had perjured his soul for wretches like the Blackburns? Look at it as she would, the thought stung like an adder.

CHAPTER XXIX.

JUSTICE.

THAT month of October, 1796, was memorable not merely in the annals of a family, but of the nation; and pretty much as the King and his Commons resented the insult of France to his peace plenipotentiary in more vigorous preparations for war, so did Sarah Bancroft resent the secret marriage and the double dealing of her son, at all risks, at any cost.

She had set him upon a pinnacle as an exemplar of filial obedience, had cited his deferred marriage as an instance of his self-abnegation, extolled his steady, sober, thrifty business habits as the result of her careful training; and done it with a concentration of affection, admiration, and reliance little suspected in the keen, unsentimental trader.

The first doubt of his impeccability had struck her on the night of her unexpected return from Chester with Muriel ; and, one by one, other flaws in her "perfect chrysolite" had been dimly perceptible ; but she had either scouted her suspicions as chimeras, or set the change in her son down to the account of his wife, who from the first had held aloof from Red Bank in a way most incomprehensible.

"There's something I can't fathom about that Lydia !" she had been wont to say to herself. "She seems afraid to open her lips or show her face."

She had penetrated the mystery at last ; had discovered how Lydia's lips had been sealed, who was the one at fault. The idol had toppled down and been shattered in the fall. Treacherous to his young sister, treacherous to her, to the woman he had married, to her father, even to his unoffending boy—his only son ; treacherous to the verge of cruelty—a living and breathing deception where she had dreamed an embodiment of truth and integrity.

She felt the shame and disgrace of his dissimulation, if he did not, and her mental agony was not to be told. A stern front might be kept to the world, but the mother's wounded heart bled within.

Notwithstanding her overnight prohibition, Sam had the boldness to present himself at the furriery in the morning as usual.

It was customary, when he entered at the door on Red Bank, for Margery to meet him at the foot of the stairs with the keys of the yard and warehouse. No Margery was there.

He walked forward. 'Through the broad kitchen window, in front of which his sister had stood washing lace when the secret of her stolen match came to light nineteen years before, he saw the workpeople trooping into the yard with a clatter, some turning into the sheds, others—chiefly women—mounting the outside stairs to the warehouse.

"Margery ! Who unlocked the gate ?" he demanded sharply, as the woman came in from the pump with the bright copper kettle in her hand.

"Cutts, Mester Sam."

"By whose orders ?"

"Missus's."

"Where's my mother ?"

"In the counting house."

"And where's Jem ?"

"In bed, poor lad."

The counting house lay behind the best parlour just as the kitchen behind the sitting room, and its window overlooked the yard and workpeople; it had two entrances, one from the yard, and the other from the lobby of the house, close to the staircase foot.

If he had thought to find his mother in bed after her long journey, and to be himself first in the counting house, he was mistaken. His brows contracted; there was perplexity in his cunning eyes. He stood a moment, then grasping his smoothly-shaven chin between his left thumb and forefinger as if to hold by something—if that something was only himself—he strode across the lobby to the counting house.

The books lay on the desk, open. Cutts, with an air of new importance, was leaving by the opposite door, and Sarah Bancroft was throwing after him her final instructions, "It must be seen to at once."

She turned sharply as she heard the step of her son, and stood with her back to the high desk, as if standing sentry over it.

"What brings thee here?" she asked abruptly, confronting him with a stern, rigid face, where the high cheek bones and hard mouth seemed to stand more prominently out, and the ruddy veining of the healthy cheeks to have grown purple against the grey hue which had crept over her complexion so newly.

"What brings me here? Where should I be if not in my own place?" he answered with affected coolness.

"*Thy* place? Ay, so long as I thought thah was treading i' thi father's footsteps it was thy place. But dost thah think thah'rt fit to sit on the seat of a just and honest man, to have thy name in a business he had made and left with an honest name? Dost thah?" and with her hand on the high stool which had seen so many years' service she stood and looked him searchingly in the face.

"Ay," was his unflinching answer; "I do. If I've done wrong the fault lies at your door, and I've had all the blame and the harass. Why did you set so many stumbling blocks in my path, striving to keep me single till my best days were gone? I married a decent lass, and if I didn't bring her home no fault of mine. Had not you forbidden me to marry before I was a partner? and had not you put off the partnership from time to time as if you meant me to be a bachelor all my life?"

"I wish it *had* been put off for ever," she said with deliberate incisiveness, "I'll see that it is put off for ever, and that without delay. Was it fault of mine that thah winked at thi young sister's secret marriage, and forebore to inform me, before or

after? Was it fault of mine that I find thee leagued with common robbers, to screen their crimes?"

Sam visibly quailed before her; still he did his best to keep a bold front.

"Ay, mother," answered he, "if you had not been so stern and hard, Ellen might never have gone off on the sly as *she* did; nor I have been afraid to break the ice for her. And if you hadn't driven Lydia and me to extremities with your whims about early marriages, and kept one on tenter hooks lest our secret should leak out, *we* might never have been in Maggy Blackburn's clutches or bound to do her bidding. I'm sure I've done my honest best in the business here, and you can't deny it, hard as you are!"

To Samuel's attempted justification she had listened, but the impression he made was adverse only. In calling her "hard" he smote her as with a stone.

"Thah repeated thi sister's offence, without thi sister's excuse. If I was hard, Farmer Bradley was not. Was my wrath more to be feared than the peril of thy own son's soul among robbers and worse? Was I hard to Ellen in the long run? If I forgave her, might I not have forgiven thee, if asked? Had I ever a hint that thah wanted to marry? Thah never said one word to plead for the sister I cast off. Thah mayst spare thi words now. I have done with *thee*. I shall see if I can make a better man of thy son. Let Lydia come week by week for what cash thah requires, but never do thah set foot on these premises again at thy peril. I'll see no time is lost in closing the business, and handing over every shilling that is fairly thine. But I shall deal with thee through my attorney. And now go."

Sam, who had noticed that never once during this colloquy had she addressed him by his familiar name, made another attempt to retain his position and insist on his rights as a partner. He might better have attempted to move a stone wall.

Then he tried an appeal to her motherly feelings, and professed contrition. Had he done so at first, had he come and made a candid confession, late as it was, she might have relented; but now she only looked at him with gathering scorn, and bade him "Begone."

"The man who thought so hardly of his own mother that he could leave his lawful wife to suffer all the pangs of shame, with no refuge in her extremity but Maggy Blackburn's; could suffer his lawful son to be born and hidden away like an unblest babe, and could let that woman and her sons hang this secret like a millstone round his neck rather than risk the loss of hard cash

dependent on a *hard* mother's favour, deserves to find the *hard* mother *hard* as he fancied her. Go! I say, if thah would not have thy disgraceful story told to every workman on the premises!"

Thus adjured, he slunk away; went back through the house, so bitter against the boy who was likely to supersede him, that though he heard Jem talking to Margery of the strange things he had seen on his journey, he never set his foot in the kitchen, or called the child to him for a father's embrace.

Fortunately for the boy he had fallen into better hands. Hard as was Sarah Bancroft to the outer world she was never hard to the child. Her son's reproach had galled and stung her. To him she was henceforth hard as flint; to her ill-used grandson she was soft as down. A mutual affection sprang up between the old heart and the young one, and no doubt kept that old one from breaking.

Indeed, the boy was her first care. He was respectably attired, sent to school, openly acknowledged as her grandson, James Bancroft—Jem no longer.

Her next was to seek her lawyer, make a fresh will, take measures for annulling the partnership between herself and son, and for winding up the business. Her first move in that direction had been made when she left Delamere without buying a singleskin.

Her son Samuel had gone home like a beaten cur, yet nursing his passion as he went. Livid with suppressed fury he entered his house, only to assail his wife as the primary cause of all his misfortunes; to curse the day he had ever seen her face or been deluded into making her his wife.

"What could I see in your apple cheeks to make me forget the risk I ran? If you had not entrapped me, lured me into marrying you then and there —"

"I entrapped you, Sam?" interrupted Lydia in terrified amazement.

"Ay, you. If you with your smiles and your wiles had not befooled me, or my mother had been one a man could speak his mind freely to, there would have been no need to marry in haste, only to——"

"In haste, Sam; why, we had been courting five years," put in Lydia timidly, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Better have courted ten years than have come to this pitch. But for our hasty marriage and the coming of that lad, there would have been no need of that greedy old hag. Curse her! and her sons too! and those who brought me into her diabolical clutches! Their hands were never out of my pocket!"

He gripped his hands and flung his arms aloft so wildly, that sobbing Lydia could but cower in her chair and shrink from him in terror. Yet amongst it all she could thank God their little girl was safely out of the way at school, and would hear nothing of this outburst—hear nothing of the accusation launched against herself, that she had lured her husband to his ruin.

She knew it to be utterly untrue. Knew how she had combated his pleadings for a private marriage, begged him at least to take her father into his confidence, both before her marriage and after. Gone on her knees to him not to leave their boy with the Blackburns, but to ask her father's care for him, if he was afraid of the mother he pronounced so harsh and hard.

He seemed to ignore all this; and as he paced the floor of their household room, spoke only of himself as the sport of fate, the innocent victim of others' wiles and wickedness. Not for one moment did he blame his own duplicity and cunning, his own want of manliness to break the meshes of his own web.

Yet, coward that he was, and conscience-smitten under all, he had not had courage to assert his rights as a partner in the furriery and brave his strong-willed mother, lest she should carry out her threat and unveil him then and there.

He loved money, and the closing of the prosperous concern would shut him out from making or handling it. He had no fear of his mother's strict justice; no fear that she would deprive him of the means to live.

But—and this stung him worst of all—he only was to receive it through Lydia—Lydia would learn to despise him when she knew how liberal had been his incomings compared with his meagre allowance to her.

Suddenly, as a new thought struck him, he left Lydia rocking herself in her agony of grief and trouble, and hurried out of the house in search of John D'Anyer; hardly heeding or seeing the nods of passing acquaintances as he went up Shudehill towards Sugar Lane.

He found his brother-in-law in his warehouse, directing the unpacking of the goods the carrier had just brought in from Chester; goods unsold and others taken in exchange.

James Hargreaves had just quitted the warehouse, leaving behind his version of Milly's disobedient act, and John D'Anyer's hearty concurrence in her choice between two suitors. She was wise, he said; Bob Bent was a gentleman; Stott, with all his money, never was and never would be. He was quite compassionate towards the young people, and full of the subject. It was some little time before Samuel could find an opening for his

plausible tale. That he was the first to tell it he felt assured, from the lightness of the other's manner, and the ease of his reception.

Sam began with an appeal to his fellow feeling and sympathy as a man and a gentleman. "He had fallen into disgrace with his mother," he said, "and had come straight to him for his counsel and intervention, knowing well he could depend on him. He need not tell him how averse his mother was to his marrying, or what had made her so. Well, he had fallen in love with Lydia, when quite a young fellow, and had been courting her so many years that at last to prevent someone else snapping her up (he said nothing of Farmer Bradley's cash), he ventured to marry her, hoping to win his mother over in a month or two. That three years had gone by before he had permission to bring home a wife, and it was only by stealth he could see either Lydia or the boy she had borne him, all those years."

"A boy!" exclaimed Mr. D'Anyer, "then little Lyd was not your 'first.'" The D'Anyers had lost three boys in their infancy.

"No, worse luck," cried Sam, and ground his teeth, "but for him our secret might have lain hid till doomsday. Mother came across the lad, either at Waverham, or the Kingsleys, ferreted out proofs of our marriage somehow, brought Jem home with her; and now is for turning me out of the business and winding it up. A pretty kettle of fish because a man is honourable, and marries a woman instead of keeping dangling after her for half-a-score of years to please another woman's whim."

"Where is the lad?"

"Oh, Jem's at mother's, she means to keep him," she says, "and discard me."

"Jem! eh? Ah, I begin to smell a rat! I think Ellen and Muriel made his acquaintance some years ago. But come to the point, Sam, what do you want from me?"

"Well, mother's confoundedly savage, and I want you to pacify her if you can. I know she has the highest respect for you—and—well, you see, if she overlooked Ellen's offence, she may be induced to overlook mine. It all depends on the mediator. I can trust you as a *gentleman* to do your utmost for me and Lydia."

"Tchut, tchut!" said he, "you might find many a better ambassador. But come into the house and let us talk it over with Ellen during dinner."

Sam had played on the other's "gentlemanly" foible with success.

John D'Anyer, who knew only part of the case and nothing of the Blackburns, went to intercede for his brother-in-law. "You forgave us," he said, "don't be too hard upon Sam."

"And no thanks to him that I did! He has been hard upon Lydia, hard upon his boy. I might have forgiven his marriage at the time, I cannot forgive that now after his ten years' deceit. My dealings have been honest, upright, straightforward; I am bound to wind up the business lest Sam should bring it into discredit. The man who is systematically dishonest to his mother will not be honest to the world. I'll see that he is paid his fair share to the last penny, and then he may go where he likes, do what he likes, set up in what line he chooses; but the books of Sarah Bancroft and Son will be closed, never to be re-opened. I'll see he deceives *me* no more."

If this had been a prompt decision, it had not been made without a sharp struggle; and her face, harder, sterner, more deeply lined, betrayed it. But her motives for thus abruptly calling in her accounts and closing an old-established business she did not reveal to strangers; and when Pitt's reckless withdrawal of specie for war purposes and the service of doubtful allies caused the Bank of England to stop payment the following February, amid a general commercial panic, she was congratulated right and left on her foresight.

It did not take long either to wind up the concern. Credit had not attained its present formidable proportions. Much of the Bancroft's dealings, especially with Irish and Welsh traders, had been either barter or cash transactions; and few, indeed, were her outstanding debts when she presented herself in Manchester Hall at the next October Fair, not to buy or sell, but to confirm the fact that the furriers, Bancroft and Son, would manufacture, buy, or sell, no more.

What she had given up, the active, energetic woman scarcely realised so long as there was business of any kind to do. It was not until the last cartload of skins had left the warehouse, when the clatter of clogs had ceased, when the ledgers were closed and carried from the office, when a great "To Let" was chalked on the gate of the deserted premises in the rear of the house, and silence succeeded bustle, that she felt the full meaning of her own act.

Her former customers in Buxton, in the belief that she must have some interest in the family of the young officer who had been so intimate with Mrs. and Miss D'Anyer, had kept her as well informed of the progress of Sir Madoc Wynne's daughter and son-in-law towards recovery, and of the trial of the two

Blackburns as could be learned from the sources available to them. Her informant had no suspicion of any keener or closer interest in the matter; certainly Mrs. Bancroft's steady-going son's connection with the murdering horse-stealers was never dreamed of.

The stolen horses had been found at a horse fair as far away as Skipton-in-Craven; the men themselves in Delamere.

It came out at the trial that, as they rode down from the Winnats and through Castleton at a hard pace a blacksmith had called after them that "the black horse had a shoe loose," had been answered with a gruff curse that he "had best mind his own business," and that the blacksmith standing out in the road had shouted after them along the Sheffield road that it was his business, but that if they lamed the good beast it might hinder their business, and his remarks to the loungers around the smithy called attention to "the queer customers who were so shy of being customers."

The cast shoe had hindered their business and kept them in Sheffield to have the horse shod; and there again the long figures and short tempers of the men were observed, and not altogether as strangers. There was another stoppage at Huddersfield, and there the men had parted with not only the horses but the garments stolen from their victims. Sir Jenkyn's groom and another from the Buxton stables were set on the trail of the beasts; and the clothes dealer, being pounced upon as a receiver of stolen goods, gave the constables all the clue they needed.

Among the many rings and watches found in Maggy's cottage was the watch of Norris, another strand in the rope which was twisted to hang her two sons. It was inscribed as the gift of his master for faithful service, bore names and dates, or it might long before have been parted with. In those days of blood-money, it was not safe to trust "receivers" with too much.

There was evidence to hang the men thrice over.

Sir Jenkyn's was conclusive.

He had wanted a guide; the man Miles Blackburn had volunteered; had led them to the chapel; had offered to show them a more picturesque road back; had beguiled them into a horrid mountain pass where the other man lay in wait, and before they had time to think the two were upon them.

The blacksmith added his testimony, and a woman who saw them ride sharply down the descent from the Winnats, also recognised them.

Had there been any doubt of the prisoners' guilt, it would have been dispelled by a confession made by the elder brother Miles.

Not only had it been their intent, in conjunction with the postboy, to rob Captain Wynne years before, but, disappointed of that, they had way-laid the first solitary traveller they met, who happened to be the very captain's servant. A friend of their mother's had found them a lawyer, and he had found means to get them off. On another occasion he had himself murdered and robbed a gentleman who had hired him as a guide, and pitched the body into Eldon Hole; and if his brother had met him there, and not in the Winnats by mistake, he had intended to have served the new married folk the same, and if they had done so there would have been no tales told. Eldon Hole kept its secrets close and for ever. He had many more crimes on his conscience, he said, and he could not die without lightening the load.

It was a relief to Sarah Bancroft to find that in this confession—made in the cart beneath the gallows, whilst the other fellow remained sullenly mute—printed and circulated by hawkers over the country, no mention was made by name of the "friend" who had found the lawyer years before. It was sufficiently mortifying to think that her son had consented to screen such wretches rather than brave her anger; and it did not serve to alter her resolution one whit. She carried out her plans to the end. She carried them out, but there were thorns under the victor's wreath. The old business was no more. What would life be to her when her last farewell was said to her many old customers in the Manchester Hall which she had helped to build?

Yet the journey to Chester put thought aside for a time; for her business was not wholly unpleasant. She had gone to Waverham by the way, and there arranged with Farmer Bradley to take their grandson in three or four years and make a farmer of him, promising to leave the farm to the boy. And she anticipated the pleasure of freeing Muriel.

With the Kingsleys she made no stay. She had not forgiven them for leaving her in the dark so long, whilst her little grandchild was being illused and neglected, if not worse. She could not pass through the forest without thought of all that had happened within its bounds. Yet she hurried on with a grim sense of satisfaction that justice had been meted out on the wrongdoers. Had *she* not been dealing retributive justice forth, even to the wounding of her own heart? She went forward to release Muriel and see her indentures cancelled with less of tenderness towards the girl than of triumph over Mrs. Hopley.

"I don't see what John and Ellen have to grumble about; they've one less to keep these hard times, and the discipline has done the lass good. Taught her humility and obedience to her

elders. It's a pity her stuck-up sisters had not been ground in the same mill. They'd be none the worse for it," she argued with herself; but she lost sight entirely of the religious training of the girl, the receptive soil, the seeds sown early by the mother hand, the fostering and watering under Miss Williams's gentle care, the companionship and influence of Deborah Massey's old Bible! True, she herself had taken to study the Great Book in her lonely hours, but she read it not aright. She read it rather to support her own views and prejudices, than to undermine and re-fashion them. And, consciously or unconsciously, she felt empowered to hold in her own hand the balance of justice even, and to cast what she would of reward or penalty into the scales of the future.

CHAPTER XXX.

SEPARATION.

MEANWHILE the year had not brought to Muriel D'Anyer unmingled bliss, although love had opened out new vistas of delight, and given to life a fulness and completeness all love's own. She saw not much of Arthur; had no leisure to answer a tithe of his many treasured billets; but he held unimpeached his place as the noble Prince Arthur of her girlish dreams and imaginings, growing nearer and dearer every time they did meet. And no small part of the honour in which she held him was due to the chivalrous manner in which he recognised her position with regard to himself. There were no surreptitious meetings in out-of-the-way places. If he could not always be at liberty on her only free day, Sunday, when he was he braved the eyes of the congregation at the Cathedral with her by his side, evidently as proud of his companion as if she had been "born in the purple;" and, to prevent any possible misinterpretation, he introduced her to more than one of his father's old friends as "Miss D'Anyer, my future wife."

Of course gossip made itself busy, and at first he had to encounter no small amount of raillery and banter from his brother officers in the garrison, anent his "devotion to the pretty young dressmaker;" but the promptness and decision with which he met a jest with the emphatic declaration, "That lady is to be my wife, sirs," soon put a stop to it, without any attempt at bluster.

Not that he was proud of Muriel's occupation ; he would have been glad to obliterate the fact, but he loved her apart from, and in spite of it ; and it was a point of honour with him to place their mutual relations on the best footing.

Seeing that his association must either elevate or degrade, he took care that there should be no mistake about the former.

All went well with the pair through the winter and the spring, and Mrs. Hopley, with an eye to her own interest, was less exacting than heretofore. But, towards the close of July, her manner underwent a sudden change, for which Muriel could in no way account. She, however, contrived to make matters indoors anything but pleasant for her apprentice ; but the girl set it down to ill-humour consequent on bad trade, and the cares of a large family ; always willing to find excuses for others. She was not given to trouble Arthur with her "petty annoyances and vexations," as she called them, or they might have compared notes, for about the same time he became conscious of a something intangible in the social atmosphere overshadowing their mutual association.

It was noteworthy, though neither noted the coincidence, that, in the month of July, Mrs. Wynne had again taken up her abode at the Plas by Sir Madoc's invitation.

Lady Jenkinson had, of course, gone to her husband's home a little farther south, and the genial old man, finding the solitude of his large rooms intolerable, stifled his resentment, and once more held out the hand of amity to his sister-in-law, decrepit though she was. She had so far benefited by Buxton as to use her hands, and could play a game of cards or backgammon with him in the absence of guests.

Muriel had not been kept in ignorance of the revelations and changes in the Manchester family circle. Both from Mrs. Kingsley and her own mother she had heard of her grandmother's discovery and consequent resolve ; from the latter of her grandfather D'Anyer's decease, and his will, from which her father was all but excluded.

From Milly Hargraves long, wild, incoherent letters had come. Milly had sent them by a carrier to ensure delivery, though disguised as a parcel, to avoid and evade the heavy post-office penalty for infringement of right. But, however conveyed, they brought only distress to sensitive Muriel, who, in the plenitude of her abundant love, could not bear that another should be less happy than herself. The last of these conveyed the despairing intelligence that Robert had been coerced or deluded into marrying Ann Barber, and that Milly did not care what became of

herself. Before Muriel was home again, no doubt, her fate would be sealed, and she might be carried off into the wilds of Yorkshire, never to see anyone she loved again.

Muriel did her best to console poor Milly, though she had to sacrifice her night's rest to answer her; and she grieved that the best she could say would fall so meaningless on Milly's ear.

"It's well for you, with a lover you adore waiting to marry you, to tell me to be patient," Milly had written, and it made reply more difficult, for Muriel felt its truth.

Thus for many reasons there were shadows athwart the sunshine, and it was with a beating heart Muriel awaited that last arrival of her grandmother; it meant so much for her. She wondered how the old woman of business would feel with no business on hand save to say farewell to people and places she had known so long. It would be a sad farewell, she was afraid.

Whatever her grandmother felt, she kept it well covered up. She never held out her hand or voice for sympathy. She would never show that it was needed. But the twelve months had ploughed their way over her face heavily, if their burden had not bent her back. She still kept herself erect, and when she walked into Mrs. Hopley's showroom it was as one who might bend others but never bent herself.

Mrs. Bancroft did not have everything her own way. She went into Mrs. Hopley's showroom with quite an air of triumph; she came out of it with that rigid set of the face so common to it of late.

"Thah will miss thi apt embroideress," she had said, with exultation, when Muriel was upstairs taking leave of her associates.

"Nay," was the calm retort, "Miss D'Anyer has trained me a successor; and," Mrs. Hopley added in her loftiest manner, "I consider her acquaintance with Captain Wynne so discreditable that I shall be glad to have the reproach on my establishment removed."

The old woman's brow contracted. "What dosta' mean?" she asked sternly.

The lofty composure of Mrs. Hopley was irritating. "I mean that Mrs. Wynne utterly repudiates her son's connection with my apprentice, and both she and Lady Jenkinson have withdrawn their patronage so long as Miss D'Anyer remains under my roof. Her removal, therefore, will be a gain to me, and probably to herself, if she be content to enter a family which will disown her."

"I do not believe one word of it," said Mrs. Bancroft, setting her teeth close.

"Perhaps you will believe that."

"That," was a perfumed but soiled billet from Mrs. Wynne or an amanuensis, couched in much the same language Mrs. Hopley had employed. Mrs. Wynne and Mrs. Hopley both had ignored the fact that Lady Jenkinson's patronage could only be a possibility of the future, had never been in the past.

Mrs. Bancroft crushed the paper in her hand, and, the indentures having already been cancelled, turned without another word to hurry Muriel and her trunk out of the house, as if there was poison in its atmosphere.

To Muriel she said nothing, but was moody and snappish the rest of the day, evidently brooding over something in her own mind; and to the girl, longing for home news, and for something more, it was at once disturbing and perplexing.

When, as had been expected, Captain Wynne, full of hope, bent his tall and handsome head to enter the small, low room at the Yacht Inn, where Mrs. Bancroft waited to receive him, with Muriel, trembling and uneasy, by her side, he was struck alike with the change in her aspect and demeanour.

Her old heartiness of manner was gone. She shook hands with him, and bade him be seated, but with stiff propriety, and when he raised Muriel's hand to his lips in salutation, her brown eyes sought his appealingly, as if half afraid of a rebuke.

It was not until the Captain, still keeping the little trembling fingers in his own, said cheerily:—

"Well, my dear madam, the year of probation is at an end, and now that all impediments are removed, I trust I may claim your promise and this priceless hand with a good grace——" not until then that Muriel knew the secret of her grandmother's mood.

"No, Captain Wynne," said the old woman sternly, "I appreciate your constancy and freedom from prejudice fully; but all impediments are not removed. I and my grandchild have received an insult to-day which has raised up an insurmountable barrier. Until that is removed Muriel does not become thy wife with my consent. Read that!" and she flung his mother's crumpled note across the table to him.

As his eyes rested on the paper, they seemed to strike fire. He bit his lip, and gripped his hands, crushing the scented mischief maker up much as she had done; but he waved back Muriel, who had risen to scan it also.

"No, my love, this is not for you. It is, indeed, an insult, madam—doubly such, coming through Mrs. Hopley to you. It

is for me to deal with it. But I do trust you will not let the peevish irritability of a querulous and disappointed invalid come between me and Muriel. It is her happiness I seek as much as my own. My father will be proud to welcome her."

"Ay," interrupted Mrs. Bancroft, "thy father belike! But it's the womenfolk of a family that can sting a young wife like gnats if she be unwelcome. And, meek as Muriel may be, she is none of John D'Anyer's daughter if she be, as Mrs. Hopley hinted, 'content to enter a family that would disown her.'"

Muriel's face alternately flushed and paled; her bosom rose and fell; love and pride were at war.

"Muriel?" questioned the lover, his warm, tight clasp upon her hand.

A timid "Arthur!" was all her low-voiced reply.

"What dost' say, lass?" put the grandmother; adding plainly, "I've nought to say agen th' captain; but thou doesn't marry him to be scorned by his folk, with my consent."

"We must wait God's good time," gasped Muriel faintly. "Mrs. Wynne may change."

"My love, you cannot mean it," implored Arthur. "War may separate us,—send me away to a foreign station——"

"All the more reason you should wait, young sir. Would thah drag Muriel into a foreign land, and perhaps leave her there a widow? No! thah hast clenched the nail. You must wait."

Neither argument nor entreaty would move Sarah Bancroft from the stand she had taken. She left him in the room with Muriel for a while, but it was only to seek and return with John D'Anyer, with his pride and wits aflame, to echo her opinions with emphasis; and if Arthur Wynne had found the pride of trade as strong as the pride of birth in the old furrier, he found both united in her haughty son-in-law.

There was a painful parting the next week; all the more painful because it was indefinite. They had buoyed themselves up with the prospect of an immediate marriage; and it is hard to say which felt the disappointment keenest. Muriel, feeling herself of small account at home, had hoped for a haven and rest in a husband's love; he for the pure and loving companionship he had never known. It was hard to bear. More than once he was tempted to ask her to become his without their consent, but he feared to risk her denial and disapproval.

Mrs. Hopley was passed over as beneath notice; but there was an unpleasant scene at the Plas with Mrs. Wynne, which ended in the final estrangement of mother and son; and the lady had little reason for elation over what she called her "triumph," when

she refused point blank to give him a "written retraction of her unjustifiable note," or a sanction of their union under her own hand, either; since in that refusal she lost her son.

Indeed, if she had no qualms of conscience, Owen, her maid, soon gave her cause to doubt her own policy.

"Look you, matam, you may pe glad to have so goot and kint a daughter py your chair some days pefore longs. Suppose I wass to get married and leaves you, matam, look you! what then?"

"You married, my good Owen? at your age? Ridiculous!"

But there was a peculiar smile on the face at her back, as she saw it in the dressing glass before her, which made her feel as if it were not so absurd as she supposed, and she found herself speculating what she would do, now Pauline was married and gone, if Owen *should* leave her—leave her alone in her helplessness—to strangers.

But she never once conceded that she had done wrong to separate her son and "that dressmaking girl," or that her note to Mrs. Hopley was, as he had said, "unjustifiable."

Sarah Bancroft had, on the contrary, compunctions visitings whenever she looked on Muriel, whose serene eyes held depths of sorrowful thought which yet moved no complaining lips; but the old woman never dreamed of lowering her flag, or surrendering her granddaughter to be scorned; and she was as mute as Muriel on all that concerned the Wynnes.

The return journey was a silent and miserable one. There had been a promised stoppage at Northwich to visit the newly married Mrs. Asa Booth, and the good Dr. Holmes; but Sarah Bancroft was in no mood for anything but to hurry over the ground, and Muriel, who rode on a pillion behind Cutts, had neither care nor spirit to press the matter.

She too longed to be at home, to be her mother's informant, to seek counsel and sympathy from her; but she saw that she had her own burdens to bear, and would not add to them the weight of her young sorrow. She spoke as cheerily as she could, and let none know how her heart ached under her smiling countenance; even the good mother scarcely divined all. And there is no doubt the effort to seem cheerful brought its own calm. There could be no fretfulness with reliance such as hers.

"It is only waiting, mother," she said; "I know Arthur will be true to me, and, please God, it will all come right in the end."

"I hope so, my girl, I hope so," and Ellen D'Anyer turned away with a sigh, grieved at heart over the pride which held the happiness of two young hearts of no account, though she added,

"and it is as well you have come home for a while; you have been away such a weary time."

And no doubt the mother had missed her, for neither Anna nor Marion came as close to her in thought and feeling. Neither of them saw the loveliness of duty in the same degree; and neither was willing to make the sacrifices demanded by the pressure of the times and circumstances, without open resentment and grumbling. Neither had the intuitive perception that the mother overtaxed herself to spare them; that the time Anna spent in gossip out of doors, or Marion in personal adornment before her looking glass, might have been better employed, either to save her or save others.

Muriel came wonderfully to the relief of all, in many ways; and Milly Hargreaves clung to her with wondering admiration and sympathy. Only she fancied Muriel's love for Arthur could not be as deep as her own for Robert—or her sorrow.

Their relatives were richer than themselves. John D'Anyer's sisters had all married men who either had money, or knew how to make it; and when the old manufacturer had died at the beginning of the year, the eldest son took the business; and little came to John's share. It was a sore disappointment. There was suspicion of chicanery, and much ill-feeling between the brothers and brothers-in-law.

Disappointment with John D'Anyer took an ill form. He gulped down liquor to hide it, and then, in a spirit of bravado, added his father's trade to his own, not to be outdone. It caused a strain on his capital which he never wholly recovered; and, had not Sarah Bancroft secretly come to his relief during the panic, he must have gone to the wall.

Beside the commercial depression was the general scarcity of provisions. Pies and puddings had long been banished from the tables of the wealthy in order to cheapen flour for the poor, and a prohibition was laid on the manufacture of white bread.

For the same reason a tax was laid on hair powder, and its use in the army abolished.

The very month after Muriel's return, there was a disposition to repeat the rioting of the previous year, on account of the high prices of food.

Everywhere there was an enrolling or mustering of volunteers; colours to be presented, or balls in their honour; and there were always invitations for the handsome D'Anyer girls from their aunts or cousins for these shows. Then came the contest between the narrowed income and the desire to dress as well as their richer cousins; and I am afraid tears and ill-temper marred

enjoyment when the new scarf or the new hat had to be denied.

Muriel had been a worker; and on one of these occasions she said it did not require three or four women besides a servant to keep the house in order; and she suggested that work for the warehouse should be done by herself and sisters, and that the money so earned might serve for their wardrobes and pocket money; and so save their father's purse.

There was some demur at first, especially from Marion, but vanity prevailed over pride, and soon the three were back-stitching the stamped-leather tabs of braces (or gallows, as they were then called, or suspenders) in an upper room, though the two were terribly afraid lest their useful occupation should get wind, and it was some time before even Milly Hargreaves was admitted to their secret. She, poor girl, on the eve of marriage with the undesirable John Stott, was loud in lamentation that she had no trade in her fingers whereby she could earn her own living.

"I only wish I had learned to make bonnets, or dresses, or stitch braces, or anything useful; I would have run away from home instead of marrying, if I could only have kept myself. I'm sure I envy Muriel, that I do," she said.

Her cousins, however, were not proud of their gifts in that respect, unless it might be Anna, who refused to see the advantage of class distinctions, and was given to talk to her father's fustian cutters more than was altogether necessary.

They always held themselves in readiness to receive visitors downstairs, or to go out for a promenade; but they never objected to leave Muriel behind at her stitchery, and when they had the materials, were glad enough to fall back on the dressmaking abilities of which they were so much ashamed. She appeared to take it all for granted; said to herself that "work was a remedy for a sore heart," that "people were sent into the world to be useful to each other," and was rather pleased than otherwise to be left alone. And after Milly Hargreaves was carried off into Yorkshire as the wife of John Stott, bargained for as much as a bale of goods on the Exchange, Muriel was very much alone, Sara, on her inspiring, having begun to relieve her over-tried mother in household matters not in Betty's province.

Her aunts as well as her sisters seemed to think that Muriel had been sent into the world to play the part of "general utility," especially her aunt Bent, who, whether regardless or regardful of her son Joe's aspirations, wanted Muriel at the Grange at all times and seasons, but more especially when a room, or a dress,

or a table needed particular decoration ; she was "so obliging." "Too obliging," her grandmother said, with the addendum, "thanks empty nobody's purse."

But Muriel was always ready when Joe came to drive her there in the gig—no, not always. There were long letters coming from time to time, and when these came she shut herself in her own room to answer them as she best could, for her heart and her obedience were at variance, and many were her secret tears, many her secret prayers for guidance and support, whilst her quill went over her paper. Through all Arthur's letters ran the one appeal, "Be my wife, Muriel ; I am lonely without you," but she could never say she had the consent of her elders, and "I cannot make them unhappy by marrying without it. We must wait," was in every reply.

The three sisters were hard at work upstairs, in the critical year '98, on some spring goods for a London order, when a knock at the street door announced a stranger ; a friend would have turned the handle to walk in.

It was a visitor for Miss D'Anyer.

Down went needle, brace-web, leather ; off went the great apron ; there was a momentary adjustment of curls, and downstairs went Muriel to be caught to the heart of Arthur Wynne with all the rapture of a lover long parted from the idol of his adoration.

Her nerves were strung up to patient resignation, but the unexpected joy overpowered her, and she sobbed upon his bosom in the very overflow of gladness. They were not sad tears, however, and as he seemed content to kiss them away, she was tranquillised ere long, and ready to lend an ear to all he had to say.

It was the old story. He longed to make her his wife without delay ; but there was now an addition of urgency to the well-known plea.

The regiment, he said, were expecting orders to embark for Holland or Belgium. How long he might be away, how long the campaign would last, he could not tell ; but he could not leave her in uncertainty. He prayed her to become his wife, and go with him. The major, his father, would be a double protection to her, and all possible provision should be made for her comfort. And he listened for her answer as if life and death hung on her words.

He could scarcely have come with a worse argument for the surrender of Muriel. Not that she herself would object, she was willing to travel the world with him, and with her head upon his

breast she told him so. But she was not of age, and the decision did not rest with herself. She could only refer him to her elders, and, fearful of their veto, she was loth to break in upon the blissful dream of the present, in which the light of his eyes, the tones of his voice, held her enthralled.

There had been no necessity to proclaim throughout the house who Muriel's visitor was; his uniform would have told that, had his features not been familiar even to Betty through a miniature which had been substituted in Chester for the crystal locket. So that when Muriel's first outburst of emotion had subsided, and she was ready to announce his presence to her mother and father, and introduce him to her sisters, they were all prepared to meet him.

And, so long as he forbore to make his errand known, his reception was most cordial. But with that came a general chill. No one was willing to part with Muriel now. Even John D'Anyer had begun to realise the value of his daughter. And, with the war prospect before them, timid, gentle, little Mrs. D'Anyer, who had formerly put in a word for the lovers deprecatory of the pride which would sacrifice their happiness to the satisfying of a vain doll like Mrs. Wynne, even she ceased to advocate the match, with the sights, and sounds, and horrors of coming warfare in view. She loved her child too well to consign her to such perils.

In the midst of the discussion Mrs. Bancroft came, and again the question was put, and again the reasons given, and again the captain's voice was drowned. The word "Holland" must have scared them.

"A sea voyage in a troopship, a campaign in that land of mud and dykes. It was not to be thought of," said one and all—not Muriel; she looked wistfully from one to the other, and clung to him, and said, "if there was danger she would elect to share it."

But down came grandmother Bancroft's foot. "I'll see thah do nothing so foolish. You are both young enough to wait; and I think, Captain Wynne, thah would be more sensible, and show more real love for the lass, by leaving her in comfort and safety with her friends instead of dragging her into danger. She don't go with my consent."

There was nothing either imposing or impressive about the manufacturer's house in Broom-street; and the captain must have been wofully in earnest, and devotedly in love, to stand the many rebuffs he met, and remain unchanged.

Muriel's heart bled for him as well as for herself. The sun had been shining when she had entered the parlour and found him

gazing on her embroidered portrait, on which a sunbeam rested ; but clouds had overcast the sky, and an atmosphere of damp and discomfort had seemed to come in with her Grandmother Bancroft.

Muriel turned her brown eyes pleadingly towards her ; though her trembling hand never once left Arthur's clasp, and the look must have disturbed the old woman, for, though she shook her head, and said, " No, no, my lass, I can't suffer thee to go to be killed, with either fright, or cold, or famine, or sword, or bullet ! " she added. " Let the captain sell out, or exchange, and stay in England—we're like to have fighting enough here ere long—and I'll not gainsay him ; he may have thee, and welcome ! "

And then, muttering something about taking off her wet cloak, she marched off into the back room as a sort of hint for the others to follow ; in truth uncomfortable over the aspect of affairs, and even over her own decision. But she did not change it, and if any doubts of her own infallibility were rising in her mind no one else was the wiser.

Selling out or exchanging were out of the question, and so Arthur said to Mr. D'Anyer, when, declining all proffers of refreshment, he shook hands with them one by one as they left the room, glad to be once more, for however brief a space, alone with Muriel—and with his disappointment.

He, with all the untried British soldier's confidence of success, made light of the dangers to be encountered. " Do you think, my darling, I could be so selfish and cruel as to drag you wilfully into danger and discomfort. The wives of other officers and men will accompany the troops. Think you it would be allowed if they were not to be cared and provided for. Oh, Muriel, my love, you must not think me so selfishly devoid of thought or care for you. Mrs. Bancroft is mistaken. *You* would not wish me to sell out at such a crisis, would you ? " and, as he held her close, he looked into her eyes for her reply.

They fell before his own ; her answer was long in coming. " I cannot think of war without a shudder. That the passions of men or nations should rise so high as to make bloodshed patriotism, is to me terrible. Yet, seeing that our country is threatened, and that even peaceable tradesmen are arming in its defence, what can I say to you, who are a soldier ? Being a soldier, your first duty is to your King and country. How could I ask you to set that duty aside, and bring the stigma of cowardice on an honourable name, only that you might make me your wife a little earlier ? I did not love you because you were a soldier, Arthur ; but in spite of it ; for all that was good and noble and

chivalrous in your conduct. Do you think I should love you better if you sold out for my sake? Nay; I should think you had tarnished your honour, and were no longer my Prince Arthur."

"These are brave words, my Muriel; and with my whole heart I thank you for them. They take some of the bitterness from parting." And as he spoke he looked down into the clear brown eyes that once more were raised to his, and pressed a kiss upon her brow, as much of homage as of affection.

Brave words were hers no doubt; but they were not easy to say; and poor Muriel had need of all her Christian fortitude; for she found obedience hard; and very white were the lips with which she bade him farewell, and promised to be faithful whatever might betide; though they little foresaw all that would betide when he tore himself away.

"I may be months, nay, years away, my Muriel," he said, at last. "Can your constancy endure the long separation?"

"It matters not, months or years, Arthur. True love does not measure time or distance save in heart beats and anxiety. Fidelity is not so much a virtue as a necessity. Change with me is impossible. You will find me still the same," she whispered; looking up tenderly through the tears which had begun to flow.

"But a soldier's life is uncertain, my love. What if I never come back?"

"Hush!" and her lips blanched. "Do not suggest such a terror. I shall never marry until you do. You must come back. I will pray for you night and day."

"Ay, do, my own; God bless you! Muriel; God bless you!"

The straining clasp relaxed! he was gone; his last kiss on her pale and quivering lips; the skies wept over him, and she wept for him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

SARAH BANCROFT'S WILL.

Mrs. BANCROFT's experience inclined her to suspect that the disappointed Fusilier Captain might steal a march upon them, and run off with Muriel when least expected, so, in order to guard against such a contingency, she carried her off to Red Bank, and scarcely allowed the girl out of her sight.

She took care at the same time to let her know the great things she would do for her if she kept single a year or two, and

married with her approbation, whether Arthur Wynne or someone else.

Since Sam had got into disgrace, the three hundred a year promised to Muriel on her marriage had expanded into five ; and her grandmother did not fail to tell her of it, or that she would forfeit all if she married against her wish, as Sam had done.

She need not have taken so many precautions. Arthur Wynne was of too noble a nature to suggest a runaway marriage to the girl he loved, even though he exercised the right of his manhood in the selection of a wife ; and, though at one time sorely tempted, he had too much respect both for her and himself to make such a proposal ; indeed, had he done so, Muriel's filial obedience and affection would have taken alarm and opposed him ; and he knew it. But he would have risked the loss of marriage portion could he have made her his wife without it, although he was neither so rich nor so simple as to despise the fortune Muriel was likely to bring.

It was part of Sam's punishment to know that a new will had been made, from which he was excluded, and that Ellen and her children were to have so much on which he had reckoned as his own. That his own boy James was provided for was no satisfaction to him. His only satisfaction came from the handling of the crisp bank notes when the partnership closed, and he knew that the thousands were his own.

The natural bent of the man then was shown. He threw off the sober garb, the sober, thrifty habits he had worn so long in the eye of dry and of his mother ; "determined to cut a dash and enjoy himself."

Lydia could have told long before, had she been so minded, how he had commonly cast off his business suit, and his business manners, with business hours, and to what his frequent headaches might have attributed. But she had been warned to hold her peace ; so she kept out of his mother's way, and that of others, seldom going beyond her own doorstep save to the adjoining church or market, lest she should let slip some unlucky word or other. He had burdened her life with secrets from the first.

Few traces of the buxom country lass were now to be found in Mrs. Samuel Bancroft ; she had shed too many tears over her secret marriage and her unacknowledged boy ; and but for her little girl her life would have been dreary indeed. Sam took care it was not much more cheerful for the visits she paid to Red Bank, whether to receive his money or to see her son.

In the newness of his exasperation (for Sam considered and maintained he was the injured individual, not his mother, whose

fortune he had helped to make), Lydia's husband would have debarred her acceptance of the privilege to see her boy; but he thought better of it, and ere long Lydia, even little James, became in his hands innocent and unconscious spies on the mother who had cast him off.

There is no doubt that casting off had stung him almost as much as the loss it involved, and every fresh token of favour to the D'Anyers roused him to a pitch of savage jealousy.

It was not long after Captain Wynne's departure that he heard how much his mother had settled on Muriel and on her sisters, and he swore with many an oath they should not have it.

Muriel was still with her grandmother; she had taken on herself the arduous task to net a crimson scarf for her soldier lover before he was called away, and late and early the stitches grew upon her mesh, and her netting needle flew until her fingers were cut and sore with the running silk. It was completed and despatched. The hasty letter which acknowledged its receipt told also that the route had come, and they were to sail for Ostend on the morrow. They would be on the sea when it reached her.

Muriel had carried the letter to her own room to be kissed and wept over with none to scan or rebuke; she had flung herself upon her knees in incoherent prayer for her dear one's safety, and was rising to her feet when she fancied she heard a sound of scuffling below, and then a fall.

There was a moment's wonder what it might mean, then a hurried rush downstairs, a glimpse of a familiar figure flying through the hall, a clash of the front door.

A moment more she was in the parlour calling "Margery! Margery!" in a voice that was like a shriek.

She had found her grandmother stretched senseless on the floor, the semi-circular door of the corner cupboard wide open, the old lady's bright steel girdle-chain dangling and swinging from the bunch of keys in the lock; a chair overturned beneath the high cupboard.

Muriel was on her knees with the capless white head of her grandmother resting on her bosom, when Margery came darting in fresh from the washtub, her arms all suds.

In, too, came James from school, crying; his breeches, cap, and spelling-book all muddy, his slate broken.

"He's knocked me down and broke——" The cry stopped and sank to an affrighted whisper, as he saw his grandmother with closed eyes and a white face being lifted from the carpet to the sofa, and Muriel almost as white.

"Was father running for a doctor when he upset me?" he asked.

"Your father, James? Was that your father that ran out of the house?" cried Muriel in a panic.

"Ay," said the lad, in open-eyed wonder.

Muriel and Margery exchanged glances as they laid their burden down, and began to chafe the old hands, in one of which was a white rag. Samuel Bancroft had been forbidden to cross the threshold. What did it all mean?

In the midst of her distress and their unavailing efforts to restore consciousness, the question kept recurring to Muriel's mind: "What does it all mean?"

The answer came all too soon.

Someone ran for a doctor, though it was not Sam. He was nowhere visible.

A neighbour to whom Jem had run in a fright had done their errand.

Sarah Bancroft's eyes had unclosed before the doctor came; but though they roved round and rested on the corner cupboard with a troubled expression, her lips remained sealed.

Many were the questions asked and answered, for the doctor himself could not read the symptoms by intuition, and there seemed to him nothing on the surface.

No, there was no accounting for her fall, though there was a bruise on her shoulder, and another on her wrist, and this, the doctor said, was like the impression of a grasping hand.

"She was a hearty woman for her years." "Was not troubled with either vertigo or syncope." "Never had an ailment within knowledge." "Was not resting on the back of her head." "Had not struck the furniture in her fall." "Had not been sick." "Must have been reading, for the big Bible was open on the table, with her spectacles laid upon it." "Might have fallen from the chair; it lay overturned beneath the open cupboard, as he might see."

The doctor was perplexed. His patient's system had sustained a shock; but whether the fall was the result of the shock, or the shock the result of the fall, was more than he could determine. His remedy was the same—blood-letting. It was no remedy for the shock she had sustained. A shock more mental than physical; but to this no one there had a clue.

A messenger was despatched to Broom-street, and soon Ellen D'Anyer was there to share with Muriel the anxious watch by the bedside, where was never a hope to cheer, never a token how the hale woman had come by her disaster.

It was all a doubt, a question, and a mystery.

The sufferer was alive, but made no sign of understanding or recognition. She took no sustenance; seemed unable to swallow. Only a feather dipped in diluted brandy was drawn from time to time between her lips.

John D'Anyer and other members of the family came and went, and the doctor was in and out, but nothing more could be done; nothing more was known.

And nothing would induce Muriel to leave the room even for an hour. A supernatural power of existing without sleep seemed to be hers.

"I have been used to sitting up night and day," she said, "and now I could not sleep. Grandmother might wake and need me."

Indeed, if she chanced to drop into a doze in her chair, in five or ten minutes she was awake again with all her faculties alert. "A born nurse," Mrs. Kingsley had pronounced her years before; and here she was proving it, in her care of the grandmother who had so hastily resented the epithet as an imputation. All that was past and forgotten; and if the white head retained any impression of the past, or of the gentle ministrant to her few needs, no one could tell.

A week, ten days went by; the impassive patient was evidently sinking.

"Had we not better send for Uncle Sam?" suggested Muriel by her bedside, to her mother.

A struggle seemed to convulse Sarah Bancroft's frame; a spark of the old fire to light up her sunken eyes. Some deep excitement broke the seal upon her lips. "Sam? No!" she jerked out emphatically. Then fainter, whilst wondering and anxious eyes and ears were alert, she went on, "Sam—knocked—old mother—down. Keys—stole—cupboard—deeds——" and then the voice trailed off into indistinctness. Her lips were wetted with brandy. Her thin, veiny hand went wandering over the coverlet, as if in search of something. "Muriel—better marry—young captain—now. Ellen—Muriel—forgive—sorry."

Again a pause. The hand again went wandering.

"Muriel—where are you?" Muriel laid her beautiful young hand under the old and withered one. There was a feeble indication of a clasp. "Pray—pray for—grandmother—Sam—forgive trespass—God's will—be done!"

Sarah Bancroft had surrendered her own will at last, and her life with it.

When all was over Muriel might have succumbed to the

excessive strain on her nerves and sensibilities, but for fresh demands on her thoughts and energies.

Her father might make all arrangements for the funeral, but there was a family of females to be put into mourning, and who so fit as she to undertake this, even if she did call her sisters' needles into requisition? The very necessity to turn her thoughts into other directions acted as a safety valve, and kept her from brooding over the double loss of lover and grandmother. Still, as her scissors or her pins ran through bombazine, or crape, or calico, she could but think of them both, and of her grandmother's tardy consent to the union now impossible, and again to wonder if her Uncle Samuel had really been the cause of his mother's death.

Ay, it was Sam's doing, that was certain.

James had seen him rush from the house. There was the dying woman's own declaration. In clearing the neglected parlour for the funeral, the bit of white rag Margery had removed from her clutch was found under the sofa. It was a torn piece of a man's falling necktie. Margery knew it well.

"I saw it wur Mester Sam's as soon as I clapped eyes on it!" she said.

Sam's doing! It was clear there had been a quarrel and a struggle, but for what? And where was Sam?

He had "not been home for three days," Lydia said, when she went in great perturbation to Red Bank to look for him the very day his mother died, unaware that the old woman, who had been kind to her, was no more. He "had come home in a great fluster and a queer temper ten days before, and had sworn at her when she noticed that his necktie was torn, and there had been something mysterious going on with him and their neighbour, Mr. Garratt, the corn chandler, ever since, and somehow she felt afraid."

She might well be, for neither she nor her little ones ever saw Sam again. And ere long she had no alternative but to break up her home in Toad Lane and go back to her father and the farm at Waverham.

Her anxious inquiry for her husband supplemented the disjointed revelation of the dying woman, and helped with other fragmentary evidence to prove the main facts.

The struggle had evidently been for the old woman's keys; for the chain was broken, had been torn from her girdle, and a tin box had disappeared from the cupboard. It did not contain Mrs. Bancroft's will, that was found with other private papers in the old bureau; but it held the title deeds of valuable properties,—might have held all, but for her belief in the old adage, "Never

put too many eggs in one basket;" and its loss was not discovered until after the reading of the will, which disinherited Sam, and left Ellen Bancroft sole executrix.

Then Muriel remembered that her eye had been arrested by the vacant place on the shelf,—had missed a familiar object; but in the double anguish and perturbation of the hour she had not given it a second thought.

With that box had gone all prospect of wealth for the D'Anyers.

Sam had made good use of his time, if he had not been prepared long beforehand to clutch the property. He had sold not only the freehold of the clump of houses in Toad Lane and Fennel-street to the corn chandler Garratt for a mere song, but the Red Bank premises and other properties elsewhere, to a stranger who had been in treaty with Mrs. Bancroft herself for the deserted workshops. Little remained but a cluster of houses at Ancoats, the farm at Waverham, her shares in the Manchester Hall, at Chester, and her balance in the New Manchester Bank, the latter considerably reduced by sums recently drawn out for investment, of which not a trace remained. Whether the securities had been locked in the tin deed box could never be ascertained.

Its effect was most disastrous on John D'Anyer.

Not so much in the loss of prospective competence: he could be no worse off for want of that which had never been his. Not altogether for lack of the ready hand when he had bills falling due and was likely to be pressed for funds, for whatsoever Sarah Bancroft lent he had been wont to repay to the full; but for its moral bearing, in the violence done to his family pride, to his human instincts, as well as for his own disappointment, and the rage it engendered.

In railing at his brother-in-law for the outrage he had committed, and in seeking vengeance on him he neglected his own proper concerns, at a time when an Englishman's business demanded his closest attention.

It was in vain that his wife and Muriel reminded him, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord; I will repay." Remonstrance was thrown away upon him.

He carried a pistol about with him, and vowed he would "shoot his thief of a brother-in-law;" and for two years that loaded pistol was kept ready in his breast pocket.

He was saved the guilt of blood on his soul, for Sam never came in his way.

Whether pursued by remorse, or fear of detection, or simply from an eager longing to escape with his prey, he had fled; and

that before a full knowledge of all he had done could have been more than a stinging prescience to him. Yet he had left his white-haired mother on the floor, and could not be ignorant of the probable consequences.

The questioning of an acquaintance on the strange occurrence, and his mother's peculiar condition, must have aroused an alarm in his breast. It was ascertained that he, in haste to depart leaving wife and children behind, had bought a horse at Hyde's Cross for fifty pounds, and sold it with broken knees in Liverpool for ten the day after. And when, unknown to him, his mother died and his sin was revealed, he was on his way to America with his ill-gotten gains. Whether they met with a French cruiser or privateer by the way, or went to the bottom in a storm, nothing sure was ever heard of the ship in which he sailed, or of him.

Lydia wept over his departure, and met his accusers and abusers with the conviction that "he would have been another and a better man but for his mother's constant preaching that saving and money making were the end and aim of life, and that no man had a right to marry until he had made a fortune."

"If instead of wedding on the sly as he was almost forced to do by her queer notions, he had married me openly and brought me home, I might have helped him to save and make the money he was so fond of," she said to John D'Anyer. "What it cost to keep them Blackburns quiet, there's no telling; and he was like a ramping madman about the house when he was let in for paying a lawyer to tell lies for the rogues. No, Sam was what his mother had made him, dead and gone though she be. And whether I ever see him again, or I don't, I shall ever say it."

So someone had faith even in Sam, that he was not all bad, and might have been better, and she, the one who had known him at his best, and at his worst, and who had suffered most through him and by him.

And in that faith let us leave her in her uncertain widowhood, to train the children he had left, and to work for them and her old father with unflagging perseverance to the end, a good wife and a good mother, and, barring the one great error of her life, not a bad daughter. Waverham knew nothing of her husband's misdeeds, and she was careful to keep the knowledge from his children.

Before she had fairly turned her back on the home which had held so much misery for her, John D'Anyer had commenced litigation for the recovery of the property. The case went to trial, and though there was a clause in the will that "Ellen

D'Anyer's receipt should be the discharge thereof," and the holders could show but the receipt of Samuel Bancroft, they held the original title deeds, and the property had otherwise been legally transferred, and that before the death of the testatrix had given finality to her will.

The conveyancer, a lawyer who had taken fees on both sides, and had obtained, under false pretences, the signature of Ellen D'Anyer to papers she should not have signed, narrowly escaped being struck off the rolls, the judge threatening him for his rascality in open court; and though he gave judgment for the parties who had bought and paid for the property, he also gave leave to move for a new trial.

But law is a costly luxury, and these protracted law-suits had so impoverished the D'Anyers that no further action was possible, though many friends and advisers—one a young lawyer often to be seen in the Broom-street parlour, named Jonathan Booth—counselled otherwise, and prophesied victory.

Amongst these were Bob and Joe Bent, the former of whom was married, to the satisfaction of father and mother, if not to his own, and in practice, with a fine estate in prospect on the demise of his wife's father; the latter of whom, Joe, had exchanged into the Light Horse Volunteers, and came on his gaily-caparisoned steed, leaping over the guardian chains of Broom-street gentility, as if to take the avenues of Muriel's heart by storm also; with his new uniform and higher rank. He was no longer a corporal, but a cornet, and gave much more time to his regimental drill and parade than he did to the factory and cotton spinning.

Joe could not believe in a woman's love outlasting years of absence and silence, and, when nothing was heard of Captain Wynne, said to her, "Ah; Muriel, you had better have put 'up with a plain Lancashire lad like me;" but he did not torment her.

"If I bother her she's likely to send me about my business as Anna sent her unfortunate swain the other day," he argued with himself. "She'll maybe think better of it, and change her mind before long."

But when he saw how anxiously and wistfully she listened to the various scraps and driblets of war news brought into the house, and watched the new expression which deepened on her countenance, as the months rolled by, he began to think differently. Still he was not disposed to give up hope for himself in the end. "Never's a long day, and patience is a winning horse," was his consolation, but patience did not seem to bring him much nearer to the winning post.

Sarah Bancroft's dying permission for Muriel to marry Arthur Wynne had come all too late. And well it had. His company was one of the two companies of Fusiliers Major-General Coote landed, with other forces, to destroy the sluices in the canal at Ostend; and when Sarah Bancroft was being carried to her grave in the Old Churchyard, he and his father were being marched to Lisle with the remnant of their men as prisoners of war; so soon had the campaign come to an end for them.

Muriel knew it not. Defeats are not trumpeted abroad; they only are buzzed about in whispers, and details are hard to get at, or they were in the days when there was neither steam, nor telegraphy, when the post was uncertain, and the press in its infancy.

Muriel had the sickening ache of uncertainty at her heart; but her hope and faith had sure anchorage; there was no feeble yielding to despair on the first alarm, and home anxieties were so pressing she was afraid to add to her mother's troubles by any visible token of her own. Only on her knees could she pour them forth into the ever open ear of her Lord, and only from Him could come the strength to bear them with composure.

Joe was chivalrous in his way. The serenity with which she went about her household duties, the celerity with which her needle flashed, the calmness with which she set self aside to secure any trifle of enjoyment or adornment for his sisters, did not deceive him. He saw that the silence of Arthur Wynne lay heavy at her heart, and set about gaining intelligence of his rival to lighten it. Brave Joe!

He had long been admitted to the arcana of the private work-room, now more than ever a necessity, and, feeding his hopeless flame the while, sat and read to his cousins, whilst they stitched away far into the candle-lit night. He had always brought them dribblets of news from without, of the rebellion in Ireland, the Reign of Terror in France, warlike activity at home; and now he never lost sight of the Welsh Fusiliers. Now it was an exchange of the prisoners at Lisle; anon it was their removal to the headquarters in Guernsey; again, after a lapse, it was the expected return of the regiment to England.

A letter from Arthur Wynne himself that came like rain in the parched desert followed this, and told of letters despatched home and to her which must have miscarried, of inability to leave even for a day, and of the coming embarkation with Sir Ralph Abercrombie's army for Holland. She had at least time for a reply, and it went, to be to her lover all his letter had been to her. Joe brought word that the troopships had left the Downs. This was in August, 1799.

The next news was of a tedious and tempestuous voyage; of a difficult landing effected in face of the enemy; of a battle fought with varying success, in which, however, was no report of wound or scathe to Major or Captain Wynne, and he made the most of this.

Joe had next to tell the unpalatable news of the withdrawal of the British troops from Holland, and their removal with the women and children in Dutch schuyts to the English line-of-battle ships lying fifteen miles off the coast. But he did not tell that the *Valk*, with part of those troops, was missing, since two companies of the Welsh Fusiliers, including Major and Captain Wynne, had embarked in her.

It was some time after, when suspicion had become certainty, and the story of the very few survivors was made known, that Joe, with a delicacy born of his forlorn attachment, called Muriel alone into the front parlour, and broke to her gently the catastrophe of the storm-tossed *Valk*, which, after driving almost ashore on Yarmouth sands, was beaten back to rocky Norway, and finally went to pieces off the coast of Ameland, flinging human lives like wrack upon the waters. Nineteen out of the hundreds on board had been cast ashore on the little island, but neither Major Wynne nor his brave son were of these.

Muriel had listened with eager questioning in those big brown eyes of hers.

"Lost—all—Arthur—lost!" she gasped, her face white as ashes, and then it dropped on her hands and the sofa arm as if lightning-struck.

Joe went out and closed the door behind him, then, after a while, sent her mother to comfort her. In about an hour Muriel went upstairs, and was seen no more that night.

She put on no mourning robes. "My sorrow needs no livery," she said, "and my loss is not to be told in bombazine and crape."

Nor did she give way to moaning or lamentation, and only that her face continued white and sober, and her manner more than ever subdued, none would have guessed she had so deep a sorrow at her heart. Indeed, had self-repression not been part of her nature, her active desire to serve others would have kept her from brooding by finding occupation both for hands and head. When Anna and Marion threw down their work and needles, declaring they were "not going to be slaves for anybody," she kept quietly at her task. And both by precept and example she stimulated little Sara to be, as she called it, "mother's right hand in the kitchen," as she herself had long been everywhere.

John D'Anyer made no mistake in saying that his daughters were a "fine set of girls," for Muriel now came in for her share of the admiration that followed the sisters whithersoever they went, and certainly her voice had added some musical notes to their hours of song; then, notwithstanding their father's struggles against the great commercial pressure, they—at least Anna and Marion—dressed well, as the word is commonly understood; and not only their father, but Aunt Bent encouraged them in this.

"Tchut! Let them dress, it is necessary to maintain our position, if I am but a beggar's inkle weaver. To be poor and seem poor is ruination!" was his dictum.

"If they earn gold let them wear gold," said Mrs. Bent to her husband, who, knowing something of his brother-in-law's difficulties, had made a remark on their attire during a ball at the Grange, given to a number of volunteer officers and others. "I know I should not care to see John's girls about me worse dressed than our other nieces, and besides, they spend less than you think. All that embroidery was Muriel's work, and the dressmaking too. They're downright hard-working lasses, and will make good wives, if they are a bit dressy. And as for Muriel, she's a treasure! She was helping cook all yesterday with cakes and jellies, and trimmed my dress and cap this morning, and look at her now in that simple white muslin, and not an ornament but that everlasting locket miniature! I only wish she would take to our Joe."

"But she won't," said Charles Bent. "Muriel's heart is filled."

"Ah! so I'm afraid. She cares to go nowhere. I don't think she would have consented to come into the room to-night if Joe had not told her that we expected Lieutenant Hill, and she hoped to get some particulars of the wreck of the Dutch ship that sweetheart of hers went down with. She clings to the belief that Captain Wynne was not drowned with the rest."

"Then Joe was a fool for his pains. If he wants the lass himself why should he help to keep the old memory alive?" quoth her husband.

"Well, it's likely enough Joe expects to convince her the captain has gone to the bottom."

"H'm, he'd best have let well alone! Look how eagerly she is listening to all the lieutenant has to say, with her lips parted, and white as her cheeks;" and Mr. Bent crossed the room to listen too.

Lieutenant Hill, one of the survivors of the ill-fated *Valk*, was recounting, no doubt, for the hundred and fiftieth time, the story

of his shipwreck and rescue; telling it too like a well-worn tale to a group of attentive listeners in the great bay window, until a question put to him by a young lady with a face as colourless as her own frock, who had hitherto kept well within the shadow of the heavy velvet curtain, aroused him to consciousness that one of his hearers had a personal interest in his narrative.

He had gone at length through the transfer from the schuyt to the frigate, the close packing of the unwieldy old vessel with four hundred and forty six souls, men, women, and children, the wounded and the sick, all huddled together, ill provided with common comforts for 'a quick passage across of a few hours' duration; and then the miserable beating about for twelve days in the fogs and storms of November, with not a mention of the name for which her ear was strained.

"Major Wynne and his son, Captain Wynne, were on board, were they not?" was uttered anxiously, it may be hopefully.

A quick, sharp glance at the questioner, and then the narrator's voluble speech took another turn and tone.

"Yes, young lady, but the major was unfortunately wounded; he had lost a leg, and lay in a blanket on the forecandle with others in as sorry plight. The captain acted as his deputy; was here, there, and everywhere, endeavouring to infuse hope and courage into the sinking hearts of the men. Now down in the hold with Lieutenant Hoggart and a file of men working at the pumps, then with the crying women and children aft, making arrangements for their safety in case the frigate parted." "God bless him!" trembled on Muriel's pallid lips, in an undertone audible only to Joe, close by her side. "He was there when I saw him last. We were then fast on the sandbank, the waves beating against the frigate's sides and over her decks as if all Neptune's sea horses were riding over us to trample us down. All at once there was a shock, a sound of tearing and riving, and I knew the timbers of the *Valk* were rending asunder. For my own safety I rushed to the forecandle as the vessel tore in two, and her mainmast fell crushing and crashing the lives out of shrieking sailors and soldiers, their wives and little ones. For a moment I had caught a glimpse of the brave captain, as if about to spring across the opening gulf to join his father; then the mast fell, and the afterpart of the ship was gone—he and all its freight of lives were lost in the boiling surge."

"Water," cried someone; "Miss D'Anyer has fainted."

Joe's ready shoulder supported her head, his disengaged hand opened the casement, drew the curtain before her for a screen, and waved intruders back.

In a few moments she revived.

The interrupted narrative was being finished farther away.

"Joe," said she, with her hand on her side, "I should like to ask Lieutenant Hill a question or two. Will you bring him here after a while?"

"To be sure, if you think you won't faint again."

And Joe watched his opportunity.

When he brought Lieutenant Hill back she was alone.

"Sir," said she, "I did not hear how you were rescued. Was it not possible that Major Wynne and his son were also saved?"

"I wish I could say otherwise, but, indeed, it was not possible! I had thrown myself flat on the forecastle, and saw with horror the afterpart break up, and the ill-fated crowd go down shrieking and clinging to each other, some swept away amongst rigging, some struck dead by blocks or bolts. I never saw Captain Wynne again; he must have gone down at first. As for the poor major! What chance was there for a maimed man in such a tumult of waters? The forecastle did not hold together long. I had barely time to fasten myself to a portion of the lighter woodwork, and on that I reached the shore. Neither Captain nor Major Wynne were amongst the fortunate few the good-natured Dutch fishermen found on that barren island of Ameland, and there was not a boat in sight to pick a straggler up. I am sorry, young lady, to be the bearer of no better news, since I perceive the two gallant officers were your friends, but 'better a finger aff than one aye wagging;' it's always best to know the worst, to my mind. Mrs. Wynne gave them up at once."

"Gave them up." It was not until Lieutenant Hill spoke as a survivor and an eye witness that Muriel knew how much she had clung to Hope. His words seemed to crush and stun her, but she did not faint again; and from that night no one heard the name of Arthur Wynne from her lips.

Marion and Anna, surrounded by fluttering beaux at the other end of the long dancing room, where a footman was handing wine and jellies round on a silver salver, heard nothing of this, being more congenially engaged; and when informed by their Uncle Bent that Muriel had fainted, were not particularly sympathetic.

"She should have stayed at home," was all they had to say. And in future she did.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW IT ENDED.

It goes without telling that these fine well-dressed girls of Mr. D'Anyer's had fully their share of admirers; as a natural consequence they were hard to please, treating their adorers somewhat cavalierly.

There was a rumour afloat that one of the sisters had so driven a suitor to distraction, that he put an end to his life and his despair in his own fishpond. However this might be, Marion was ambitious, looked high for an eligible offer, and thought the world was at her feet. Anna had no such lofty aspirations, but she seemed indifferent to flattery, and turned with scorn from a red-coat. She was a puzzle to Muriel, who, keeping all her agony and shattered hopes to herself, smiled pleasantly on all alike without affectation, and without a thought of conquest.

But, ere the new century had got firm foothold, the long delayed crash came. John D'Anyer was a bankrupt! And oh! the shame and the disgrace to him!

The failure of a large London firm he had credited too freely, and the stoppage by war of his American trade, brought it about. His creditors met. The cause was apparent, others were in like case, or might be any day; and such was their belief in his integrity that he was permitted to receive all and pay all himself, and time allowed to him for the payment. But, in spite of this, and though he ultimately paid twenty shillings in the pound, he never recovered the shock, or the disgrace. Indeed, an attack of paralysis was the immediate consequence. From this he rallied, but was never his old self.

And now he learned truly to value his eldest girl, and she as truly to estimate her grandmother's forethought in tying down her bequests to Ellen and her girls.

What Sam and the law had left to her in cash was her own now she was of age. This she devoted to the clearing of her father's liabilities.

"I could not put the money to more honourable purpose," she said; "and my father's good name is the breath of life to him."

Then she took a house herself in Portland-street (a wide thoroughfare only partially built, with patches of verdure between the blocks,) not far from her Aunt Fawcett's, and, bending to circumstances, gave out to the wealthy relatives, who had so often taxed her skill gratuitously, that she was about to turn mantua-maker in earnest, and to train her sisters as assistants.

"The property at Ancoats," she said to them, "will preserve mother and father from feeling their dependence, and we must leave no stone unturned to keep them in comfort. I thank God now that grandmother did place me with Mrs. Hopley. I think she must have foreseen an emergency like this. And it is quite as well I did not marry and go away." But though they heard her sigh, they did not hear the "Alas, poor dear Arthur," which finished her speech mentally.

So brave an effort met with the success it merited; and though Marion's pride revolted at working for hire, for strangers as well as for their own aunts and cousins, Anna and Sara turned to with a will, and they soon were hard at work, Muriel measuring, fitting, cutting out, directing, and doing it so cheerily it put spirit into the others.

It was a time of retrenchment even with the rich; dresses were made to last longer than heretofore, and they had to sit closely at work to make it pay; though Muriel had soon a good and fashionable connection.

As may be supposed, their many admirers had vanished with their altered position, and Marion grumbled unceasingly. "If you are content to be an old maid, I'm not," she said snappily to Muriel; who simply answered, "Old maids have their uses; they are happier than unloved wives; and God's will is not our will."

But Marion was not destined to be an old maid, or Anna either; and if Muriel would have listened to Joe Bent she need not long have been a spinster. He entreated her to let him save her from the task she had undertaken. She only shook her head and said, "Nay, Joe; you are a good fellow; but marriage is not for me."

One of Marion's many admirers, a fine stalwart young trader named Wilson, who had just begun business for himself, and who poured forth his devotion in verse (often on the window panes, whilst she was long at her looking glass,) still remained true to his first love. She had shown him little favour in the days when richer flutterers abounded; but his constancy had touched her heart; he was accepted; and their early marriage was looked for, and the house furnished, when a discovery was made which took them all by surprise, and made John D'Anyer furious.

Anna had been for some months married to one of her father's fustian cutters!

He was a man of no family; was self taught; and, though a fustian cutter, could make five guineas a week when trade was brisk:—at the time the secret came out he could scarcely obtain a piece of fustian for his frame and long cutting-knife.

It turned out that Anna had gone on an errand to a mercer's; and, whilst Muriel was waiting for the trimmings she had been sent to match, she had met the young man Grosmith at the Old Church, and had come back—a married woman, as if nothing had delayed her but a dilatory shopkeeper.

Surely John D'Anyer might have remembered his own marriage, and been lenient; but no, he was prouder, if possible, since his fall than before.

"Does the low-born vagabond think we have sunk down to his level!" he exclaimed with an oath; and, taking his favourite child by the shoulders, he turned her out of the house, saying, "Your place is no longer at a gentleman's table; be off to your fustian-cutting connections. I disown you;" and no intercession of either wife or Muriel could soften him.

Out of doors the fallen manufacturer was twitted with "the great match his lovely daughter had made;" or, as time went on, was told in a different spirit that she and her husband and newborn babe were on the verge of starvation. And they might have starved had it not been for Muriel, and her willing co-operator, Joe Bent, who between them found a post for Anna's husband; humble enough, but open to promotion. But neither he nor Anna might tread the Portland-street floors, so long as John D'Anyer had his abode there.

This blow from his favourite daughter's hand made the sensitive and proud man more irritable and imperious than ever, and to hide his poverty, as he thought, he became more lavish in his expenditure abroad, more exacting in his requirements at home, as if oblivious of the strain on Muriel's energies to supply his many wants. When other men of greater means would call for a glass of ale, he would fling down his money for a bottle of wine, and cry, "Tchut, be d——d; do you think I can't pay for it! I'm a gentleman. I don't drink ale."

He had a haughty belief in his own independence, having condescended to travel occasionally with samples for a brother-in-law, though he spent all and more than his commission, and was far from certain in his movements.

He had left home one morning on this business with horse and gig, and was not expected back for three or four days. The family went to bed earlier in consequence.

About one or two in the morning, Mrs. D'Anyer was startled out of sleep by a loud and prolonged ran-tan-tan at the street door.

Under the impression that it was her impatient husband who had been drinking all the day instead of leaving the town, as he

was apt to do, she sprang from the bed hastily lest he should knock again and awake the weary girls; and in the dark and her haste caught her foot in the bed clothes, and fell with a violence against the old oak coffer—her mother's first wedding gift.

There she lay half insensible, and numb with cold, unable to extricate herself; and was not found until Muriel brought her a cup of tea at seven o'clock the next morning, as was her wont.

A distracted cry for help ran through the house; as Muriel's trembling fingers in vain essayed to release and raise her. Sara rushed up the stairs, and Betty, no longer young, after her.

With some difficulty, the slightest movement being followed by a moan, the dearly loved mother was extricated from the entangling mass of blankets and coverlet, and laid upon the bed she was never to leave again in life.

She had broken her collar bone and otherwise injured herself, and though Dr. Percival was called to her aid, and she was waited on and watched with the tenderest affection night and day by Muriel and Sara, with such assistance as married Marion could render, she died in a few weeks, the victim of a senseless and mischievous frolic, mourned by her husband and by her children; Muriel most of all; not alone for the patient and exemplary life which was so abruptly closed, but for the loving touch of sympathy, of kindred thought and principle, which had knit so closely the bond of union and affection between the mother and her eldest born. Her death seemed to re-open and deepen the wound made in Muriel's sensitive heart when Arthur Wynne was lost. But she was not demonstrative, never exposed the wound; what she felt was only shown in her greater tenderness for others, and it was her lot to act—not dream.

It was conjectured that some thoughtless booby with that in his head which was not brains, must have plied the knocker for the amusement of other drunken jolter-heads, heedless of consequences. Her husband had gone about his business steadily enough for once, and he vowed vengeance against the roysterers when he came home, but they were never found, and ere long he himself had another paralytic attack which left him helpless on his good daughter's hands.

Full indeed were they then, and full indeed was her heart, but she sought help and strength from on High, and worked on bravely and cheerfully.

Her father was not merely helpless, having lost the entire use of one side, but querulous, fretful, and exacting, taxing the patience of the "born nurse" to the uttermost. He had always been dainty with his diet, but along with his seizure was developed

an enormous appetite, amounting to inordinate gluttony—save that gluttony is rarely nice or particular; and his old sensitiveness regarding his claim to gentility became almost a mania.

Muriel was careful as she could be not to wound his susceptibilities; by rising early and retiring late she contrived that his garments should be speckless, his shirt, frill, and ruffles of the finest lawn and purest colour; his pipe and tobacco box always filled and ready by his side, and, whatever business was on hand, either she or Betty would lend him a shoulder for an airing in the adjacent Infirmary gardens whenever there was a glimpse of sun.

Now and then he came back indignant that some old acquaintance had passed him by unnoticed. "The upstarts! the mushrooms!" he would cry, "to pass a gentleman without so much as a touch of the hand or the raising of a hat." And then, woe betide dinner and crockery if it were served with the slightest flaw in its faultless appointment. Up would go his stronger foot, and over would go the tripod table on which he had his meals, and amid the smash of glass and earthenware, the clatter of spoons and cutlery, the attempt to rescue the bird or joint prepared for his exclusive consumption, he would rave, then cry like a child that "even his own flesh and blood had ceased to treat him as a gentleman."

He had another cry, and as the years went by this became the more frequent and the more painful. He would individually demolish a joint and a pudding at a meal; yet, never sated, he insisted he was being starved—should die of starvation.

Now and again there were gleams of the better man, and then Muriel was "an angel," "the best daughter a man ever had," and the words made music in her heart and in her life.

One day in the autumn of 1804 (when the brief and delusive peace won by the treaty of Amiens was at an end, and war was again rampant, with all its horrors and its deprivations, and Portland Place was the gay parade ground of volunteers and regulars,) the old gentleman had been especially trying because the downpour of rain had prevented him from witnessing the soldiers exercising, according to his daily practice. Nothing had been right, he had upset his dinner because it was not flavoured to his mind. His supper of steak and ale was "not enough to sustain a fly, much less a gentleman," and then had come the pathetic cry, "I shall die of starvation," when a knock was heard at the front door, and presently Muriel was told that a lady with a little girl was in the showroom waiting to see her.

It was a late and unusual hour for a customer, but she looked for no other, when, after a soothing word to her father, and a

little dabbling adjustment of her own hair and attire, she walked into the showroom, now cleared for the night.

Imagine her surprise when Milly Stott, nervously pacing the dimly lighted apartment, in a wet and mud bespattered cloak, fell at her feet and clasped her knees, sobbing out, "Oh, Muriel, Muriel, take pity on me, and find us shelter here."

"Shelter, Milly dear, shelter; surely! But what brings you here, and why should you implore shelter so strangely? What has happened?" and as she spoke she kissed the tear-stained face, and raised her cousin in loving wonderment.

"Ah! Muriel dear, I have run away from home, and brought my child with me. I was desperate, and hardly knew what I did. We have travelled all day in the rain. My father would shut his door in my face if I went there; but you will not turn us out, will you, Muriel?" she said in broken gasps, adding, "This is my little girl, another Milly."

Turn them out! It did not look like it. She already had her arms round the five-year-old girl and was giving her the kiss of welcome, when she realised that they were drenched and weary. Whatever was wrong—and she saw that something uncommon must have occurred—that was not the time for questioning.

With the little one by the hand she led the way to the back sitting-room where she had left her father seated in his high backed easy chair, lamenting his lot by the fireside.

As they entered, Muriel carrying a candle in her hand, he caught a glimpse of the child and a female form in the shadow behind. He called out, showing what was uppermost in his mind—

"I tell thee, Muriel, I'll not have Anna or any of her unnatural brood here. Keep them away."

"It is not Anna, it is Milly Stott," put forth Muriel, "and this is her pretty little girl."

"Milly Stott," echoed Mr. D'Anyer, "then where is John Stott? He could come and see me when I had goods to be carried, like the rest of the mercenaries. Hang him! why does he hold back now?"

"He is—I left him at home in Halifax," faltered Milly much disconcerted. Then Muriel, who had been taking off the child's hat and cloak, interposed to prevent further question with her own unwonted bustle about the change of wet garments, the preparations for a warm supper, sleeping arrangements and so forth, in the midst of which he fell into a doze.

She had said nothing to either Sara or Betty of the reasons for this unexpected visit, and it was not until her paralysed father

had been settled comfortably for the night, and the bewildered child was also cosily tucked up in bed, that she troubled Milly for an explanation.

Glad enough was Milly to relieve her own feelings, and, amid showers of tears, to tell the story of her marriage seven years before, and the miserable life of restraint she had led with a man of uncongenial years and habits.

"You know, Muriel," she said, looking into the fire, "I should never have consented to marry him, even though father threatened to turn me out to starve, if I had not been told that Bob had married Ann Barber and gone to live in state at the Hall. Then I was reckless and did not care what became of me. Father was always preaching that I had better be an old man's darling than a young one's castaway; and I was mad enough to try it. I have never had a day's happiness since," she sobbed out.

"Poor Milly," cried Muriel, "my heart ached for you when I heard. It was hard for a high-spirited girl to be tied for life to a man she did not care for. But did you strive to conquer your dislike and do your duty as you vowed at the altar? I hoped that esteem might come with years, and smooth your way."

"I tried it, Muriel. I have your kind and sensible letter still; and many a time I have read it when I needed counsel and solace; and I tried to take your advice, and be a good wife; but I found it was of no use, and I gave up."

"How was that? Was he not kind to you?" and Muriel gently stroked the soft hand lying within hers.

"Well—a—at first he was kind enough, and I suppose was fond of me; but he seemed afraid to let me out of his sight, or to go anywhere without me; but I did not care to have him with me wherever I went, I was none so fond of him; and I was not accustomed to a gaoler;" and here some of the old fire burst forth.

"My dear," said Muriel thoughtfully, "I hope you did not wilfully run counter to his wishes. He might feel that it was not safe for his young and handsome wife to go abroad without a protector."

"I did not want his protection!" sobbed out Milly, "and I told him so."

"Oh, Milly, Milly, how could you? What a blow it would be to his trust and affection! A wife should be proud of her husband's protection."

"Well, I was not proud of him. And after that he took to watching me like a cat watching a mouse, the jealous old miser."

"Jealous, and a miser! Ah, Milly dear, this must be some of your old romance, and exaggeration. He cannot be a miser. It was only last year, when the war broke out again, that I heard he offered not only a large number of horses and wagons to the Government, but to pay the drivers himself; so there is no knowing whether he or the Pickfords were the most generous and patriotic. You must know this. Joe Bent told me."

"Oh, yes, I know. I heard all about *that*, but he kept *me* short enough. However, it was not for that I ran away. It was because—because he was so monstrously suspicious and jealous, and he—beat me."

"Beat you?" echoed Muriel, "beat you? Was he so cruel and violent? and without cause?"

"He had no cause but his own fancy. You know his nephew lived with us, and kept his books, and if I only spoke with Richard, or smiled across the table at him, Stott got in a rage. The second time he beat me Richard Norton took the whip out of his hands and broke it over his own shoulders. And then he turned his nephew out—and I was afraid—and ran away here."

Muriel looked grave. She knew of old how Milly's vivid imagination coloured all she said or thought; but here was something more than romance run riot. The matter was too serious to be dealt with lightly.

"My dear Milly," she said, "when you took the yoke of matrimony upon your shoulders (most unequal in your case), it needed all care to adjust it so that it should not chafe your shoulders. With care and Divine help your burden would have lightened day by day. I fear, somehow, Mr. Stott is not the only one to blame. He was not a young man when you married him. I suppose the nephew is younger. I hope you never laughed and talked with Mr. Norton with intent to annoy your husband?"

Milly hung her head. Muriel had an uncomfortable way of reducing loose impressions to hard fact. "I might have done so sometimes, and, if so, he deserved it," she mumbled out, not half so proud of herself as she had been. And then again she burst into tears, half drowning her pitiful protest, "I would not have done it if he had been reasonable, and not suspicious."

This was a painful revelation to Muriel. Here was a matter not to be dealt with lightly or hastily.

Not for one moment did she suspect Milly of aught but petulant willfulness; but her flight had widened a breach that should never have been made, and might never be healed.

She lay awake that night (when Milly slept by her child restfully) endeavouring to solve an unsolvable problem—the problem.

of reconciliation, and the rebuilding of the house of marriage on a surer basis. Yet how was she to accomplish this? Or ought she to attempt it, if John Stott was brutal and inhuman? Could Milly have goaded him to strike her?

At all events Milly was safe with her for the present. Would John Stott demand the return of his wife and child? If so, would she not be powerless to retain them?

"Milly," said she in the morning, when the little one was gone to chat with the old gentleman downstairs, "Does not your husband love his child?"

"Love her! She is the very apple of his eye! I taught him a lesson when I brought her away!" and Milly looked exultant.

"I think you have a lesson to learn, Milly Stott, and your child may teach it you before you go back. I heard her crying for her father this morning."

Mrs. Stott looked foolish, then defiant. "What if she did? and I am not going back. Not even if you turn us adrift."

"I am not likely to do that, but I cannot shut my eyes to the great trouble you have brought, not only on your own head, but on that of your sweet little one, and on your husband's, by your rash precipitance. You should have been patient, and have borne with your husband for the sake of your child."

"Ah, it's all very well for you to preach patience, that never had any troubles like mine; first Robert was torn——"

Something in Muriel's face arrested her.

"Oh, Muriel, my dear, good, patient Muriel, how could I be so thoughtless as to say *that*. I would not have wounded you so for the world!" And she threw her arms around her cousin in her penitence.

A wan smile broke on Muriel's lips. "Yet you would wound your husband by robbing him of his child! You have wounded him on your own showing by hasty speech; made light of him to the nephew he had reared. Think of it, Milly. Is not the old husband likely to feel a taunt or sneer as acutely as a young one? You can feel for me, feel also for him, and endeavour to forget his years. Think of it well, and pray for strength and wisdom to guide you."

Some weeks went by, weeks in which Muriel's patient endurance of her father's vagaries was not lost upon Milly; weeks in which Muriel saw with satisfaction how close a friendship had grown up between the invalid and the little girl who was always ready to pick up his handkerchief, or give him his pipe, and to listen to his wonderful tales of fairies and genii. She taught the child

to call him "Grandpa," and, though at first he winced, he never forbade it.

She had not been idle. She had gone to her Uncle Hargreaves, and urged upon him the necessity to ascertain the facts of the case; and how far a reconciliation was possible, or desirable. She wrote to Mr. Stott to let him know that Milly and the child were with her. As she expected, a demand came for the restoration of the child, and the mother refused to give it up.

On their mutual love for that child Muriel contrived little by little to build up an edifice not merely of reconciliation, but of future trust and forbearance, and when Mr. Stott came at the end of October to fetch his wife and child, a very different Milly went back to him, to find a different husband, a happier home. She went back to make the best of things, and not the worst. And the grip of John Stott's hard hand at parting told Muriel more than his rough words of thanks how grateful he was to her.

With the little child a light seemed to have gone out of the house; and no one missed it more than John D'Anyer. He was heard to wish Marion's lad was as big as little Milly; he missed his young companion.

"Anna has a girl nearly as old," dropped Muriel adroitly. But no word said her father.

The next day a warm winter frock was being nicely made upstairs, and a bonnet.

On the Sunday, Muriel came home from church with a little girl by the hand. "I've brought you another little handmaiden," said she, taking off the child's cloak and bonnet as she spoke. A new dark blue frock set off the child's fair hair and skin.

Her father gave a start, and his face twitched. She was afraid of her own experiment.

John D'Anyer turned his eyes from the child to Muriel, and back again, with never a word.

There was a painful pause, the child seemed half afraid and clung to Muriel's hand.

"What is your name, child?" he asked, huskily.

"Nelly, Grandfather."

"Do you know whose name it was first, my lass?"

"It was Grandmother's."

"It was an angel's name, lass, an angel's name—ay, an angel unrecognised until she took wing," he murmured to himself, adding, "Come hither, Nelly, you are not afraid of me."

Oh, no, I am never afraid of a *gentleman*."

Nelly had unconsciously played on his weakness. She had

involuntarily recognised his superiority to common men, the people of her own father's class.

Muriel left them together. When she returned he was smoothing down the flaxen curls of his grandchild, and telling her how much she resembled her own mother.

Muriel knew then that reconciliation with Anna was not far in the future. The child went and came.

In a few weeks he asked, "Haven't we a house empty we could let Anna and her husband have for a while rent free?"

Muriel was only too glad to say "yes." The loss of the rent was as nothing to the healing of strife, the restoration of her sister to her father's heart, and to something more of comfort and respectability. Hitherto she had only been able to see or serve her by stealth. It was a bright day for her when Anna Grosmith and her husband sat down at their tea-table, and no special solecism in good manners offended the old gentleman's fastidious eye.

On a bright spring morning about two months after this, when the birds were twittering among the Infirmary-garden trees, Muriel was called to the door to see a customer in a sedan chair, an old lady in deep mourning, who could not alight.

To her amazement she was accosted in the voice of Mrs. Wynne; but she would never have recognised the bygone beauty in the toothless, hollow-jawed, sunken-eyed woman before her.

Nor would she have recognised the haughty mother of her lost love in her address or her errand.

She had come to crave Muriel's forgiveness, she said; to ask her, for the love she had borne her shipwrecked son, to come and be to her a daughter.

Sir Madoc was dead. Lady Jenkinson ruled at the Plas. Owen had married Norris and deserted her years before. She was a forlorn, childless widow, and she sought Muriel's forgiveness and pity. In her loneliness she had turned to Muriel. She offered to leave her all she possessed if she would but be as a daughter to her for the sake of the one loved by both and lost.

Forgiveness and pity were ever in Muriel's gift; but she could only answer the lady that she had a nearer and higher duty to perform, in ministering to her own stricken father, watching over and guarding her younger sister.

Mrs. Wynne would scarcely be gainsaid; but she was forced to admit that Muriel was in the right, and retired, though reluctantly, to her solitary apartments in Lover-street. But Muriel did not leave her wholly alone, and she saw she was not neglected.

All her past unkindness was forgotten in the more potent fact that she was Arthur's mother, alone and helpless. Poor in all save coin.

John D'Anyer was not so placable. The sedan chair came frequently to their door. He would on no account visit the lady who had presumed to flout and scorn his daughter.

Another and another year rolled on, years in which Muriel often laughingly declared she thought she "had better drop the dress-making and set up as a professional nurse," so many were the night and day demands on her good nature and acknowledged value in the sick room. "Send for Muriel," said her aunts when illness invaded a household.

"Go for Aunt Muriel!" was the cry of her sisters when the olive branch put forth a fresh leaf. "Send for Muriel," was the first thought when the shadows of death or disaster were closing in.

The former were closing in on John D'Anyer. He had prophesied his own end as clearly as did Robert Nixon the Cheshire prophet. His fell disorder gripped him by the throat. His inordinate appetite remained; all power to swallow food was gone. It was impossible to sustain life or to nourish him, and to Muriel's intense grief, for she had loved him better in his helplessness than in his manliness, he did absolutely die of starvation.

He was laid by the side of his wife, and then Muriel and Sara were alone, and Sara with her lovely complexion and flaxen hair was pruning her wings for flight.

The year of mourning was at an end, and Mrs. Wynne, who had gone out with it, had been as good as her word. Muriel was rich, richer than John Stott's rich widow, for she had little but what she owned as the custodian of his richer daughter.

Wedding garments were in preparation for two brides; the last that were to be fashioned under Muriel's direction. She was about to turn over her business to an old apprentice. Not that Muriel was contemplating matrimony for herself.

Little nephews and nieces there were to come in and out and be petted by Aunt Muriel, but even Joe Bent had set Aunt Muriel down as a confirmed old maid.

Milly Stott was about to link her fate with Richard Norton, the carrier's nephew, her champion when a champion was needed. And lovely Sara was about to wed a Cheshire yeoman of good repute and wide acres, whose home was to be Muriel's also.

There was laughter and melody in the workroom, needles were flying briskly through satin and lace, and Sara was singing blithely over her work.

If there was a shade of sadness in the room it was deep down in Muriel's heart, where thoughts of Arthur Wynne and her forbidden bridal would obtrude, and would not be banished. Something like a tear fell on the bodice she was trimming. "God is good," she said to herself. "I must not repine. Had we been married I could not have saved his life, and might have lost my own, and then what would have become of my mother and poor father? Ah, well! if I was forbidden to wed I was not forbidden to love, and all my heart will be Arthur's to the end of my days. We shall be re-united in another——"

Her ruminations were broken into abruptly. The unpretentious knocker in Portland-street responded to a decided and vigorous hand.

A little damsel opened the door.

"Is Miss D'Anyer within?" asked a tall gentleman of the child.

"Miss D'Anyer doesn't live—oh, you mean Aunt Muriel!" recollected the child, Anna's eldest girl, Nelly. "Aunt Muriel, you're wanted!" was called out at the staircase foot. Miss D'Anyer's very identity was evidently lost in the more familiar appellation. She was "Aunt Muriel" to so many who were not even of kin.

Aunt Muriel composedly descended the stair; the stranger entered the hall and advanced to meet her.

"Muriel!" said he.

"Arthur!" she screamed, and in another moment she was clasped in his strong embrace, her soft brown eyes looking into his, as she murmured thankfully, "God has been good to us. I have trusted Him, and he has not failed me. I have waited patiently for the Lord, and He has given me the desire of my heart, even in this world."

"Ay, my love; my faithful, obedient, patient, unselfish Muriel. I have heard all the story of your goodness, your love and constancy, and there is no one to forbid our marrying now."

Joe Bent had been the generous chronicler.

Years after, when he and Muriel had taken possession of the Plas, and little ones clustered round their knees, Sir Arthur Wynne would talk over his miserable campaigns in Holland, and tell them of that terrible tempest in which the *Valk* had been driven and beaten about from coast to coast, and the horror of seeing his own dear father separated from him to go down afterwards with the men and their wives and little ones; of his struggles to clutch a drifting spar, and secure himself to it by the scarf his dear Muriel had netted. How he owed to that scarf

his merciful preservation, and was picked up helpless by the convoy of a Dutch outward-bound East India trader, after drifting many hours, and was, at the end of the voyage, landed on the island of Java ; how the capture of Batavia by the British set him free either to join the army in India or return to England. Of his longing for home and Muriel, and his election to return in a homeward-bound East Indiaman ; of its attack by a French cruiser and the surrender ; of his sufferings as a prisoner of war, first in the horrible hold of the cruiser, and then in a still more horrible prison at Marseilles ; of his adventurous escape after long years of privation and suffering, and his unspeakable thankfulness to find, when he landed in England, that Miss D'Anyer had not lost her identity in any name more formidable than "Aunt Muriel." And he never failed to tell of his open-armed welcome, or of the broken sixpence so carefully preserved. But most he loved to dwell on his dear wife's many virtues, the meekness and patience with which she had borne her lot, and he was wont to point to the old silver-clasped Bible as the bulwark of her faith in God, and her shield from the arrows of the world, her mother's best gift.

So, too, when the war was finally over, and Captain Griffiths came (minus a limb) to the Plas with his wife and sons ; and when the Kingsleys found their way thither from their new home. The Forest House had long been untenable, and soon after they abandoned it a terrible gale swept it utterly away. But no gale swept away from the hearts of Muriel and Arthur the remembrance of all they had suffered when old heads legislated for young hearts. And when, in course of time, one of Captain Griffiths' sons came wooing to Miss Muriel Wynne, and they fancied she might have made a better match, they thought of their own young days, and there was no *forbidding to wed*. It may be added there was no clandestine courtship.

THE END.

APPENDIX. .

IN changing the title of this novel from "Forbidden to Marry" to "Forbidden to Wed," I must not be accredited with a desire to palm off an old work for a new one. The alteration is due to a claim set up for the original title, as being that of a tale said to have appeared in a newspaper some sixteen years ago. I have not seen the tale, have not been able to discover it in the British Museum or elsewhere; naththeless I make the change.

Certainly the story itself is mine, no one else could have written it, for to no one living at this day but myself could all its collected facts be known. Old directories of Manchester and Chester might supply names, but only oral communication could convey, and a good memory preserve, such records of private individuals as may be found herein.

Indeed, from the heroine herself, or her nearest kin, I had most of the circumstances I have here grouped together.

Yet, whilst much of this work is true, it is due alike to myself and others, to the living and to the dead, to state that it is not wholly history. I have thrown a film over certain names, filled in gaps, supplied details, introduced imaginary characters, and imaginary incidents; in short, have constructed a romance around and out of real life-history materials.

If I have produced a satisfactory story, with a *dénoûment* that does not disappoint, I suppose I have done all that the general reader will require. For such I do not write this appendix.

There are others, as I have elsewhere said, who do care to discriminate between fact and fable, and who may care to know what warranty I have for my delineation of people who having lived their lives, here figure in *propria personâ*.

From Sarah Bancroft I am lineally descended; I may be presumed to know something of her kith and kin. For personal descriptions where memory could not serve, I am indebted to a set of small "D'Anyer" portraits, not in my possession, which

were painted on *tin* by a young Manchester scene painter in the early years of this century; the commission having been given to him for encouragement. "Muriel's" own embroidered portrait has been mine for very many years, and would have formed the frontispiece of this volume could it have been effectively reproduced. The Misses Briscoe, Mrs. Hopley, and Miss Williams are such as they were represented to me. The experience of Mrs. Bancroft's grandchild (here called Muriel) whether at school or during apprenticeship is in no wise exaggerated, and was far from uncommon at the time. The Forester's good wife found her reduced to the condition described, by starvation and overwork alone, without any sprain as an accessory; and when her prompt letter brought Mrs. Bancroft upon the scene, the female Shylock clung to her "bond" and refused to let the half-dead creature be removed even for recovery, as I have shown.

It was quite a common thing for the in-door apprentices to faint from utter exhaustion, and to resume their work when sufficiently revived to use the needle once more. It was equally common for Mrs. Hopley to leave her apprentices at work with their tasks assigned whilst she led her own children to Divine service on a Sunday morning.

It was on one of these occasions an irate apprentice suggested the carrying of Lady Grosvenor's sleeve to her up the cathedral aisle, in the face of the congregation. She and Mr. Hopley had both been long in the Grosvenor service, had courted for a number of years; but dreading children, she delayed her marriage until she was forty.—And after all she had *thirteen*.

Lady Grosvenor's languishing friend, who summarily dismissed Mrs. Hopley as a "frump," and came afterwards to make abject apologies, was so far real. Beyond that glimpse of character she and her connections are creations of mine. Her son Arthur Wynne was simply my substitute for a young officer to whom Muriel was engaged when his regiment was ordered to the Peninsula. He would fain have married and carried her with him, but her grandmother peremptorily forbade. The end justified her interference, for he was killed at Corunna, after a retreat (shared by women and children), the horrors of which make one's blood run cold to think of. Of this disastrous retreat and the siege at its close I heard many incidents when I was a child. Three of "Muriel's" cousins were in action at Corunna, two of whom were killed. It is my impression that one of these two cousins was the lover she was forbidden to wed and accompany, and for whose sake she remained single, a minister-

ing angel to all with whom she came in contact, a woman whose self-abnegation was sublime in its unobtrusiveness.

It was not from her own lips I had the tragic story of her young love; she neither paraded her sorrows or her sacrifices for others. Years brought the knowledge to me in diverse ways. I am only afraid that in penning this story as a tribute to her memory that I have failed to do justice to her real worth.

Of Mrs. Bancroft's son—whose name was not Sam—it is only fair to say that I know nothing prior to his unfilial attack on his mother when he stole the title-deeds, and made lawless sale of her property. His connection with the Blackburns is consequently mythic.

Tradition has preserved the record of certain dark deeds at the Winnats and elsewhere, I have merely given individuality to unknown perpetrators.

Not altogether so with nurse Blackburn. She did exist if under another name.

On one of the occasions when Muriel visited the abode of the Chief Forester in company with her grandmother, a coach and four drove up to the "Chamber in the Forest" at a late hour in mistake for the home of the Delamere Doctress. The carriage contained a lady *in extremis*. Common humanity dictated her reception. She could barely be accommodated with a room before a babe was born. Great was the wrath and indignation of the Forester's wife at the mistake of *her* house for that of the doctress. It was not the first time. Then the lady, whose garments were of the finest and richest texture, wore no wedding ring; and her attendants, who preserved the greatest secrecy and mystery throughout, gave orders more loftily than was pleasant.

In the morning the doctress herself appeared, and, to her secluded retreat, the mother and child were removed. A kerchief marked with a coronet was all the clue to the lady's rank or identity.

The Forester's wife shrank from admitting the nurse under her honourable roof, and I have but pourtrayed the woman's character as it was handed down to me from "Mrs. Kingsley's" representation.

I have called the scene of my incident the "Forest House" for brevity and euphony. By Ormerod, King, and other Cheshire historians, it is spoken of as the "Chamber in the Forest." Moreover, doubts are expressed whether the ancient home of the Chief Forester was in existence towards the close of the last century.

If it had not existed, Mrs. Bancroft, who dealt with the Forester, could not have stayed there, or her grand-daughter either. The latter described the place to me as "just a rambling old farm-house." *She* had no archæological interest in the spot. Mr. Leo Grindon, in a private letter says, "some old foundations are pointed out, said, I believe, to mark the site of a farm-house. I have never felt any interest in the place except as Ethelfleda's."

Add this brief note to the personal testimony of Muriel, and remember how many of the fine old halls of Cheshire have lapsed into mere farm-houses, and I think we establish the fact that "The Chamber in the Forest" did exist at the end of the last century.

It was from "Muriel" also I learned in answer, to direct questioning, how the Manchester letters were distributed at the period to which I refer.

Deborah Massey's Bible, with Prayer-book, was handed down to me. It disappeared mysteriously some ten years since. I should be glad to recover it.

The forbidding of banns in the Old Church was very real, and spoiled two lives.

Broom, or Broome Street, has, like Red Bank, long since lost its air of respectability. At the beginning of this century, the chains which preserved its right to privacy were seldom removed except to admit the carriage of Miss Broome, an elderly maiden lady, when she went every half-year to collect her own rents.

ISABELLA BANKS.

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True, that my life has been with ills beset—
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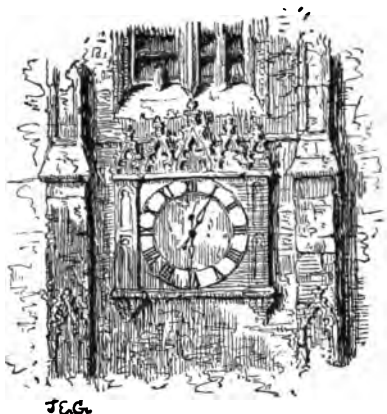
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